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‘Mixing Media’, or the Bee and the Bonnet: Play between Radio, Theatre, Television and Film

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Abstract
Despite Beckett’s claim of having a ‘bee in [his] bonnet’ about ‘mixing media,’ intermediality and transmedial adaptation were important sources of innovation for his writing, especially from the 1950s onwards. The present article analyses Play (1964) as a good example of this dynamic by demonstrating (1) how its genesis was influenced by Beckett’s experience with radio, and (2) how its own transmedial history proves that rather than rejecting ‘mixing media’ in principle, Beckett’s ostensible insistence on ‘keeping our genres distinct’ turns out to be an appeal to fully exploit medium-specific properties of radio, theatre, film and television.

Résumé
Bien que Beckett ait prétendu avoir « une abeille à son chapeau » sur le « mélange des médias », l’intermédialité et l’adaptation transmédiale constituaient des sources d’innovation importantes pour son écriture, en particulier à partir des années 1950. Le présent article analyse Comédie (1964) comme un bon exemple de cette dynamique en montrant (1) comment sa genèse a été influencée par l’expérience de Beckett à la radio et (2) comment sa propre histoire transmédiale prouve que plutôt que de rejeter le « mélange des médias » En principe, l’insistance ostensible de Beckett à “garder nos genres distincts” s’avère être un appel à exploiter pleinement les propriétés spécifiques à un support de la radio, du théâtre, du film et de la télévision.

Keywords
Play / Comédie, Cascando, All That Fall, intermediality, radio, theatre

In 1974 American director Alan Schneider wanted to organize an evening of shorter pieces with students at the State University of New York in Buffalo. He asked Beckett if he could include some of his radio plays, offering to stage them behind a screen or even in the dark. Taking some time to think about the request, which was by no means the first, Beckett eventually declined, stating his views to Schneider in a letter dated 14 September 1974: “There is no acceptable way of staging the radio plays in my opinion. Perhaps you could work on them on their own terms, i.e. record them with sound effects. Sorry to be so unhelpful. I have a bee in my bonnet about mixing media” (Beckett 2000, 320). However, in spite of Beckett’s apparent intransigence about mixing media, as expressed here in the mid-1970s, he was already doing something of the kind in the early 1960s. By transposing ideas from radio to the stage, and vice versa, he was merging two modes of dramatic writing he had passionately defended as being antipodal only a few years earlier. As we will illustrate in this article, Play, which marks the starting point of what Enoch Brater (1987) and S.E. Gontarski (1997) have called Beckett’s “late style in the theatre,” is heavily indebted to his involvement in a staging of All That Fall at the Pike Theatre in Dublin and to the genesis of his radio play Cascando. It thus seems that transgressing genres and blurring media boundaries, which Beckett allegedly disliked, was in reality an important part of his creative development that sparked innovation, especially in the post-war period when Play migrated further across radio, television and film. However, as Matthias Engelberts (2001) has shown on the basis of Beckett’s even later prose and theatre of the 1970s and 1980s, despite his exploration and indeed shifting of generic as well as medial boundaries, he never quite dissolves them.
Adaptation, Transmediality, Multimediality and Intermediality

From a theoretical or methodological point of view, Beckett’s phrase “mixing media” is not very helpful, so before we can proceed to analyse and discuss this phenomenon in relation to All That Fall, Cascando and Play, some terminological clarifications are in order first. As Irina O. Rajewsky notes, so many different interpretations of “intermediality” exist that it is almost impossible to formulate a universal definition. Because a plethora of similar terms are used simultaneously, “it becomes necessary to define one’s own particular understanding of intermediality more presicely, and to situate one’s individual approach within a broader spectrum” (50). On the one hand, Rajewsky posits historical or media-philosophical approaches to intermediality, which are primarily concerned with the diachronic development of specific media and their relationship to one another, specifically in terms of technological makeup and the modalities they employ or combine. On the other hand, she situates an understanding of “intermediality” that is rooted in literary studies, and this will also be our focus for the present article, even though such approaches are always, necessarily, informed by historical circumstances.

In this more narrow sense, Rajewsky outlines three subcategories of intermediality which all “have to do in some way with a crossing of borders between media” (50). The first subcategory, “medial transposition,” involves “the transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or of its substratum into another medium,” so that it becomes roughly synonymous with “adaptation” (51). It is a common practice and relatively easy to define, although different terms have been used to describe it. Chiel Kattenbelt, who is writing more specifically about intermediality in theatre and performance, calls it “transmediality”: “the change (transposition, translation etc) from one medium to another,” so that “once converted into the other medium very little reminds us of the medium specificity of the literary original” (23). This use of “transmediality” is slightly problematic or confusing in the context of the field of narratology is known as “transmedial storytelling,” developed by Marie-Laure Ryan (2004; 2014), Henry Jenkins (2006) and Jan-Noël Thon (2016), where the term refers to storyworlds that are constructed cross-medially, in video games, films, comics, etc. Instead of replicating the same narrative for each medium or adapting it, transmedial storytelling implies that the different media all add something new to the storyline, by exploiting the particular creative affordances of each platform, so that the storyworld is transmedially developed or evolved rather than merely repeated. For the purpose of this article, and for the sake of clarity, we shall be using adaptation and transmediality as interchangeable terms, though crucially different still from multimediality and intermediality.

Rajewsky’s second subcategory, “media combination,” entails “combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation [...] present in their own materiality” (51-52). Also known as “multimediality,” this phenomenon is typical of contemporary art installations and performances that are, to varying degrees, audiovisual. Still, the term “multimediality” is not to be confused with “multimodality,” in the sense that television, combining the modalities of sound and image, is a multimodal medium, whereas radio, made up of sound alone, is not. On a more general level, authors like Beckett, working in different genres and media such as prose, poetry, theatre, television, film and radio, can be considered “multimedial.” Kattenbelt’s understanding of the term is largely the same as Rajewsky’s, with the important addition that “because of its capacity to incorporate all media [...] we can consider theatre as a hypermedium,” and “because it is a hypermedium [...] theatre provides, as no other art, a stage for intermediality” (2). This brings us to the third and last category Rajewsky defines.

Most important for our discussion is what she calls “intermedial references,” or:

references in a literary text to a film through, for instance, the evocation or imitation of certain filmic techniques such as zoom shots, fades, dissolves, and montage editing. Other examples include the so-called musicalization of literature, *transposition d’art, ekphrasis*, references in film to painting, or in painting to photography, and so forth.

Rajewsky 52
On 8 January 1958, Alan Simpson of the Pike Theatre in Dublin adjusting brief ban on but he That Fall 1957, Rosset’s assistant Rosset seems to have to about Compared to Beckett’s well Light follows of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means (53). In other words, intermediality always implies a transposition of certain characteristics typically associated with one medium, for example radio, to another—say theatre—rather than “combining different medial forms of articulation” in one medium, which is the domain of multimediality, as we have outlined above (Kattenbelt, 25). According to Kattenbelt, intermediality encapsulates “those correlations between different media that result in a redefinition of the media that are influencing each other, which in turn leads to a refreshed perception” (25). Rajewsky and—more surprisingly perhaps, given his theatrical focus—Kattenbelt do not consider the potential correlation between radio and the stage. This is symptomatic of the general bias towards visual art forms in studies of intermediality, but smaller author-specific fields like Beckett studies are not exempt from it either. Therefore, in what follows, we wish to highlight the significance of Beckett’s involvement in radio for his late theatre.

Lighting and Posture in All That Fall and Play

Compared to Beckett’s well-documented and changing views on theatre, relatively little is known about his understanding of the radio medium. There is one particular letter in which he came closest to formulating a poetics of radio, which perhaps explains why it has been cited time and again. That Clas Ziliacus used it as the frontispiece of his monumental study Beckett and Broadcasting (1976), seems to have turned it into the quintessential statement about Beckett’s radio plays. We will add yet another count to the tally by citing it again here, but only for contrastive purposes, as will soon become clear. Upon receiving a cutting from the New York Times announcing a stage production of All That Fall, Beckett sent a “worried” and “perplexed” letter to his American publisher Barney Rosset on 27 August 1957, in which he gave a detailed explanation as to why All That Fall could not be dramatized:

All That Fall is specifically a radio play, or rather a radio text, for voices, not bodies. I have already refused to have it “staged” and I cannot think of it in such terms. A perfectly straight reading before an audience seems to me just barely legitimate, though even on this score I have my doubts. But I am absolutely opposed to any form of adaptation with a view to its conversion into “theatre”. It is no more theatre than End-Game is radio and to “act” it is to kill it. Even the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings […] will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing’s coming out of the dark. […] Frankly the thought of All That Fall on a stage, however discreetly, is intolerable to me. […] If we can’t keep our genres more or less distinct, or extricate them from the confusion that has them where they are, we might as well go home and lie down.
Beckett 2014, 63-64

Rosset assured Beckett that the radio script would only be read, agreeing with his opposition to its gaining a visual dimension in performance and preferring a darkened stage himself. On 4 September 1957, Rosset’s assistant at Grove Press, Judith Schmidt, sent Beckett another letter to confirm that All That Fall would be done as a reading, by which she meant no added light effects and no interaction between the actors of any kind, not even gestures of the hand or moving around. Four days later, on 8 September 1957, Beckett replied that he could not refuse a staging of the radio play on those terms, but he stressed once more there should be absolutely no embellishments (Grove Press Records, Syracuse University, box 84). His insistence on a so-called “straight reading,” and his strict definition of the term—no acting, no props, no lighting—was adopted by Grove in the following years as an official directive for companies wanting to mount All That Fall—and other radio plays—except for a brief ban on all non-radiophonic performances of the texts between late 1960 and early 1963.

However, just four months after this exchange with his American publisher, Beckett was already adjusting his definition of a “straight reading,” contradicting some of the points he had raised earlier. On 8 January 1958, Alan Simpson of the Pike Theatre in Dublin wrote asking him for permission to
put *All That Fall* on the stage. Simpson had tried before, on 10 December 1956, having seen the announcement of the BBC production in *The Sunday Times* (MS TCD 10731-41), but Beckett told him two days later that it was specifically written for radio and not suited for theatrical presentation (MS TCD 10731-42). Simpson respected this decision at the time, but one year later, on 8 January 1958, he read the text again and felt it could be done without much trouble, suggesting to let Maddy Rooney walk around in circles and to use mime for the scenes with the wheelchair and the automobile.

He also referred to a recent theatrical adaptation of Dylan Thomas’s famous “play for voices” *Under Milk Wood*, which presented more challenging problems but nevertheless did well in London’s West End (MS TCD 10731-55). Beckett’s reply of 15 January 1958 was curt, not finding the argumentation persuasive. According to him, staging *Under Milk Wood* had been a severe offence, and he could not face any adjustments to *All That Fall* apart from those required to do it as a straight reading, similar to New York (MS TCD 10731-56). Simpson eventually accepted Beckett’s conditions, on 21 January 1958, while trying to set the author’s mind at ease. Admitting that adaptation would be the wrong approach, Simpson explained that what he envisioned was in fact little more than a minimal use of props (e.g. a stepladder, a car seat, a bicycle, etc.) and no adjustments whatsoever to the text (MS TCD 10731-58). Disconcerted by Simpson’s skewed notion of what a straight reading meant, Beckett explained his views in more detail. Strikingly, his own definition—which deserves to be quoted in full—was no less crooked:

> By a straight reading I mean no props or make up or action of any kind, simply the players standing reading the text. The ideal for me would be a stage in darkness with a spot picking out the faces as required. It is a text written to come out of the dark and I suppose that is the nearest one could get to that with a stage reading. There could be a preliminary presentation of the characters, with lights on, by a speaker, who should also read the indications given in the text with regard to sound, movements, etc., many of which I think could be omitted. No sound effects. In New York I am told they used a lectern from which the actors read as their turns came. I don’t think this is a good idea. Don’t think I’m imposing this form of presentation. Do it your own way. All I want you to observe is the strict limits of a reading. Within them you are free to use any method you like.

Beckett begins by reiterating his standard definition of a “straight reading,” explaining there should be no props, makeup or action. He even picks up Barney Rosset’s earlier suggestion that the stage should be in total darkness, but then he makes a remarkable addition: “*with a spot picking out the faces as required.*” Despite his earlier-cited claim—namely that “[e]ven the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings […] will be destructive of whatever quality it may have”—and that there should be no additions or lighting effects, he was now trying to project a different kind of quality onto the script, not by having it acted out in the traditional sense, but by dramatizing in nonetheless. He had earlier objected to *All That Fall*’s being converted into theatre, but it seems that trying to envision an adequate way of staging the radio play—not just by way of actors reading the script—caused a gradual change in Beckett’s own understanding of theatre, and how it could potentially be reconceptualized. Characters reciting text to the cue of a spotlight illuminating their faces in the dark of course closely resembles the harrowing stage image of *Play* and some of the other late pieces. Even Judith Schmidt’s assurance, that there would be no attempt whatsoever by the actors to relate to each another during the reading of *All That Fall* in New York, strongly evokes the faces protruding from the urns, unaware of each other’s presence, which so strikes the spectator of *Play*: “*They face undeviatingly front throughout the play***” (Beckett 2009c, 53).

**Speed and Repetition in Cascando and Play**

One crucial difference is that *Play* has to be recited at great speed, but this is also a technique Beckett experimented with first in radio, particularly in the French production of *Cascando*, before exporting the device to the stage. No published version of the text, in either English or French, gives any indication about the pace at which the lines of Voice are to be delivered. It only says “*(bas, haletant)*”
The original module (no. 9) could not anticipate the delivery in mind, as appears from his marginal notes next to the speech parts for Voice with the framework for Opener and Music, that this stage direction was replaced with “a ‘false start with three white boxes, but so false, hardly dare try again’” (26 April 1962; Beckett 2014, 476). Incidentally, the fourth version of the French translation of Play (revised in November 1963) has “Débit rapide” as an autograph insertion in the stage directions on the speech tempo (BDMP9, FT2, 03r; Beloborodova, 226).

This estimate was probably made around 25 December 1961, some four weeks after the start of the radio play’s genesis, when Beckett informed Barbara Bray that he timed it at about 15 minutes (MS TCD 10948-1-169). This is just four months before the first idea for Play was mentioned to Bray, in April 1962. So, the breakneck speed at which Cascando was to be recorded by the Radiodiffusion-télévision française (RTF) may very well have contributed to the concept for Play, which also needs to be delivered in a “Rapid tempo throughout” (Beckett 2009c, 53). According to Clas Zilliacus, “[i]t would require an almost superhuman effort to obey these instructions” for Cascando (128). Beckett made them for the French production of the script by RTF radio, of which Zilliacus claims that “only the past tense will do when describing it,” because “the unique original tape was erased when, after use in a transmission abroad, it was returned to Paris” (144). Luckily, and contrary to Zilliacus’s claim, the original recording of Cascando has not been lost. It is available on the website of the Institut National de l’Audiovisuel (INA), which offers a rare chance to compare Beckett’s annotations on the late typescripts of Cascando with the actual RTF production of the script. It appears that the actor Jean Martin, who played Voice, not only adhered to Beckett’s timings, but usually managed an even faster delivery than is projected on the typescript—much faster than Patrick Magee’s rendition of the lines for the BBC production aired on 6 October 1964, which has become the standard recording of Cascando. Martin not only delivers the speech parts very fast, he also repeats some of them, which is not indicated in the published text, nor on any of the draft versions of the radio script. This is because the repetitions have a practical reason. Beckett could not anticipate the exact duration of the music because, as he was doing his calculations, Marcel Mihalovich—the composer who invited Beckett to collaborate with him on this RTF commission—had not yet written his score. When it was finally completed in December 1962, almost a year after

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1 The notation “FM2” refers to the second French manuscript of Cascando, available online in the Radio Plays module (no. 9), edited by Pim Verhulst, of the Beckett Digital Manuscript Project (www.beckettarchive.org). The original documents are preserved in the Theatre Collection of Harvard University (MS Thr 70).
2 “False start with three white boxes, but so false, hardly dare try again” (26 April 1962; Beckett 2014, 476).
3 Incidentally, the fourth version of the French translation of Play (revised in November 1963) has “Débit rapide” as an autograph insertion in the stage directions on the speech tempo (BDMP9, FT2, 03r; Beloborodova, 226).
4 The original French recording of the radio play Cascando, broadcast on 13 October 1963, can be downloaded from https://www.ina.fr/audio/PHD99200066/cascando-audio.html.
the text had been written, it counted thirty-eight pages, quite long for a short radio play that Beckett himself timed at only fifteen minutes without the music. Naturally, this created editing problems when Voice and Music sounded together. One of the solutions that Beckett came up with to incorporate as much of Mihalovici’s music as possible was to repeat some speech parts. It seems that he preferred this concession to cutting Mihalovici’s score—who could not attend the recordings—or slowing down Martin’s pace.

The actual recording of Cascando at the RTF studios in Paris did not take place until late May and early June of 1963, which coincided with the period of Play’s translation into French. However, the English text had not yet been finalized by this time, either: the writing process continued until December 1963, with a number of epigenetic additions still following in early 1964. This means that the genesis of Play spanned a period following shortly after the genesis of Cascando and intersecting with the RTF recording of the radio play. It is important to note that around the same time as the Cascando recordings were made, Beckett introduced the so-called da capo element at the end of the text, to repeat the entire play from the beginning. Though this rather late emendation might predate the French recording of Cascando, the temporal overlap is striking, especially considering that the da capo was further modified in the various productions of Play that Beckett was involved in. As James Knowlson points out, after having seen two rehearsals of the German world première of Spiel in Ulm,

Beckett dashed back to Paris to be at the RTF studios for a further eight-hour recording session of his radio play, Cascando. Although short, the trip had not been a waste of time, for it had succeeded in focussing Beckett’s attention on a number of important problems to do with the shape of the urns, the repeat of the play and, above all, the lighting.

This alternation between the rehearsals of Spiel and the French recording of Cascando triggered a fascinating cross-pollination between the texts, and the addition of da capo to Play may have been a direct consequence of that. Beckett brought his experience from Germany to the RTF studios in Paris and implemented what he had learned in a different yet related text, repeating certain speech parts of Voice. Later, in March 1964, he also attended rehearsals of Comédie in Paris and Play in London, writing to the English director George Devine from France:

The last rehearsals with Serreau have led us to a view of the da capo which I think you should know about. According to the text it is rigorously identical with the first statement. We now think it would be dramatically more effective to have it express a slight weakening, both of question and of response, by means of a less and perhaps slower light and correspondingly less volume and speed of voice.

qtd. in Gontarski 1998, 87

The effect that Beckett describes in this last sentence is a perfect definition of a calando in musical terminology, which he had sought to implement in Cascando. In fact, the first composite typescript of the radio play was still called “Calando,” until RTF officials pointed out that it sounded the same as “calendos,” French slang for camembert cheese (Federman and Fletcher, 70). The description that Beckett gives of the calando effect—less volume and speed—matches the way in which Jean Martin repeated certain speech parts in the RTF production, whispering slower and more silent, giving an overall weakening impression. Here, radio had clearly served as a testing ground for a dramatic effect that was later finetuned on the stage. As the next section illustrates, Beckett continued to experiment with it in later transmedial adaptations of Play, for radio, television and film.

**Transmedial Adaptations of Play**

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5 The dating of the actual intervention is uncertain, but Beckett does mention the da capo for the first time in his letter to Schneider of 11 May 1963 (Beckett 2000, 137).

6 Beckett stayed in Ulm from 30 May to 1 June 1963 (Beloborodova, 139).
Despite being influenced by radio, an acoustic adaptation of a stage play that hinges to a great extent on the visual for its effect seems “doomed, doomed to fail” (Beckett 2009d, 53). Predictably, Beckett did not exactly warm to the idea, just as he first resisted a stage adaptation of All That Fall. Incidentally, the idea to do a radio version of Play was already raised by the Bayerischer Rundfunk in 1963, shortly after the Ulm premiere and long before the English text was finalized. Beckett’s reaction then (in a letter to Helene Ritzerfeld of Suhrkamp Verlag) was as predictable as it was uncompromising: he stated firmly that Play is the type of a stage play that can only be seen and could not work on the radio, so he asked Ritzerfeld to decline the offer (17 July 1963, DLA-SUA-Samuel Beckett Correspondence; qtd. in Beloborodova, 119-120). Two years later, in 1965, the BBC requested permission for an adaptation of Play by the Rothwell Group, an experimental troupe of radio actors and directors led by producer Bennett Maxwell. Their idea was to replace the light beam with “a continuum of sound—an endless loop of tape of the three characters’ voices saying ‘I,’ which would be abruptly interrupted each time one of the characters was jerked into speech” (Esslin, 138). Although he was dead against it at first, Beckett seemed in the end to be willing to give the project the benefit of the doubt, as the following letter to Martin Esslin attests: “I should like to hear the Rothwell Group recording of PLAY. […] If I find it possible I’ll withdraw my opposition” (9 November 1965; Beckett 2014, 677).

As Esslin recalls, “Beckett sat through the whole play with an enigmatic and inscrutable expression on his face. When it was over, he said: ‘I don’t like it at all. You got it all wrong’” (138-139). However, after he explained his idea of how the play should be approached (“there must be a clear progression by which each subsection [Chorus, Narration, and Meditation] is both faster and softer than the preceding one”), he “became interested in the project” and eventually gave his consent for the broadcast, provided the production team “adhered to his prescription” (139). In order to introduce the desired variation in the repeat or da capo, “Beckett suggested that each character’s part should be recorded separately and that these permutations of exactly the same words spoken in exactly the same way be achieved by cutting the tape together like the takes of a film” (139). Clas Zilliacus, who discusses Esslin’s account of the Play broadcast, notes how this intermedial approach helped implement the original setup of the play:

The reason why permission was given in 1966 was that now the technical means had been found by which the original statement could be translated, and possibly even elucidated. It takes little familiarity with Beckett’s work to see that the Play version of 1966 provided a new solution to an old problem. […] The ending which cannot really end, the monstrous asymptote, is a recurrent motif with Beckett. Even more than its stage forebear, the phonogène Play, ever faster and softer, is a variation of this motif.

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The radio adaptation of Play, produced “according to the author’s prescription” (152), was aired on 11 October 1966 on the BBC Third Programme, with a repeat on 30 October 1966. In order to comply with Beckett’s wishes, Maxwell recorded the three actors separately and got hold of a so-called “Zeit-Dehner Machine” to speed up the recordings in the repeat.\footnote{Bennett Maxwell’s correspondence, BBCWAC, RCONT12, Samuel Beckett, Scriptwriter II, 1963-67. The production files and other documents related to the play’s radio adaptation are preserved at the BBCWAC (with the script available in the Play Library).}

Quite different is the story of the BBC’s TV adaptation of Play in 1976, intended for the Shades programme as part of The Lively Arts series. Compared to the daunting task of translating the highly visual play for the “blind” medium of radio, this seemed at first glance to be a manageable idea. The programme’s producer was Tristram Powell, and the plan was to schedule Play (directed by Donald McWhinnie) together with Not I.\footnote{The UoR archive preserves a script for the television adaptation of Play (MS UoR 1520-1), as well as Beckett’s directions for camera use (MS UoR 1520-2).} Beckett’s attitude to this production was again indicative of his general willingness to exploit medium-specific affordances, in this case of television. In his note on camera use, he proposes “brief close-ups of three faces with only necks of urns showing, but no
individual close-ups. The togetherness should never be lost” (to his agent Warren Brown, 20 July 1976; Beckett 2016, 431). By insisting that all three figures should always be visible on the screen, Beckett anticipated the difference between television and stage drama, and his explanation ensured this “togetherness” in a fashion distinct from the stage play” (Herren 2007, 177). In the end, the project was shelved, apparently due to Beckett’s dissatisfaction with the result. Opinions vary as to why he objected to it: Knowlson only mentions that Beckett was “unhappy with the poor quality of the film” (633), whereas Bignell states that “he did not approve of the lighting” (109). According to Herren, however, the main reason for Beckett’s refusal is that, contrary to the writer’s expectations, the BBC had ignored his instructions for camera use and instead opted for “a straight film version” of the Royal Court stage production (2007, 176). In other words, instead of a genuine transmedial adaptation exploiting the artistic and technical potential of a different medium, the BBC had chosen the easy way out, producing a result that was “too unimaginative” for Beckett (176).

Much more successful was the adaptation of the play’s French translation (Comédie) for the big screen, directed by Marin Karmitz in close collaboration with Beckett and first shown at the opening of the 27th Venice International Film Festival (29 August 1966). In an interview with Elisabeth Lebovici, Karmitz recalls his experiences with Beckett during the 15-day shooting in January 1966. Their first conversations were on “the abandon of filmed theatre. On what cinema, image and editing could bring (Bourgeois, 73). As Herren notes, “[Beckett and Karmitz] immediately abandoned strict fidelity to the original in favour of adapting the work in ways that exploited the technical possibilities offered by the new medium” (2007, 175). Similarly to the Zeit-Dehner machine used by the BBC for the radio adaptation of Play, the sound engineer involved in shooting Comédie (Luc Perini) obtained a “phonogène” – a sampling machine later used for electronic music (Bourgeois, 73). The final result—a collage of 250 sequences made to look as one long take—was a far cry from the ‘filmed theatre’ that the BBC’s shelved TV version had turned out to be. Just like in the case of the radio adaptation, this technological innovation helped Beckett to realize the acceleration as he originally had it in mind but “could not achieve normally on stage. Only the artificial process of cinema could render it” (Karmitz qtd. in Bourgeois, 73).

By 1966, Play had taken on a variety of forms, each one filtered through a different medium and enriched by its unique affordances. Interestingly, Beckett seized these transmedial adaptations of a stage play, intermediaiy influenced by radio, as opportunities to further experiment with the calando effect that was originally devised for Cascando and then implemented in the da capo of Play, now accelerating instead of slowing it down, through technological mediation in the form of a Zeit-Dehner Machine or a phonogène. The speech of the characters, at first rendered mechanically fast under the influence of broadcast recording, had effectively been mechanized in the radio and film versions. As Herren does well to remind us, rather than being against transmedial conversions in principle, Beckett held that for a work ‘to be effectively transplanted to a new medium, it must be adapted; otherwise distinction between genres is lost and confusion ensues’ (2009, 14). Beckett’s remarkable lenience with transmedial adaptations of Play may perhaps be due to the fact that it was at the core already an intermedial work. A similar point could be made about Krapp’s Last Tape, another stage play bearing the mark of other media, which Beckett also reconceptualized for TV adaptation in 1968, as Dirk Van Hulle has shown (108-114). When it comes to ‘mixing media,’ Beckett’s work from the late 1950s on clearly operates on a different level than earlier plays such as Waiting for Godot and Endgame. While these were also adapted for television and radio, he never became involved in these productions to the same extent or actively opposed them. As this article has tried to argue, adaptation or transmediality, multimediality and intermediality are not mutually exclusive or irreconcilable processes in Beckett’s writing. Instead, they combine to fuel the continuous creative innovation that marks his post-war work in particular, with Play occupying a central place in this dynamic.

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