Notes for a History of Radio-Film: Cinematic Imagination and Intermedia Forms in Early Italian Radio

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Abstract

The article discusses the concept of 'radio-film', a term which repetitively entered the vocabulary of practitioners and theoreticians during the transition to sound, and raises several well acknowledged historical notions by adopting a slightly different question: has an idea of cinema as an entirely aural art — i.e. sound cinema as 'cinema made of sound' — ever come up in media history? Starting by considering the European scenario and by focusing more specifically on the case of the early Italian radio-play between 1925 and 1935, this article explores this path as a concrete historical possibility: in this context, the surfacing of two hybrid terms such as *fonoquadro* [phonoscene/phonoframe] and *suonomontaggio* [sound-montage] will represent the case studies for a discussion on 'intermediality' both as an epistemological framework to apply and 'a state of historical transition' to investigate. By questioning the role of cinema as an always present term of comparison in the debate on the medium specificity of radio and the ways in which a cinematic imagination has affected the development of entertainment genres in radio production, the essay aims at demonstrating how a hypothesis of aural cinema as a radio art can be grounded in several concrete aesthetic and technological intermedial exchanges.

Sound Cinema as an Aural Art: a Hypothesis in Media History

During the transition to sound cinema, the concept of a cinematic art conceived for radio seemed to surface sporadically all over Europe. Between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, shortly after Dziga Vertov had announced that 'a method for recording auditory phenomena on film tape had been discovered',[1] filmmakers and critics in the Soviet Union started talking about 'radio-film'. According to Stephen Lovell, at that time radio productions were conceived in analogy with cinema, since 'the aesthetic lexicon of the 1920s had no other term for a form of

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[1] Dziga Vertov, 'KinoPravda & RadioPravda', *The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. by Annette Belson, (London, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 95.

aural performance that was not theatre […], not a literary or journalistic text […], and not news report or commentary […]'.[2] In the meanwhile, the Breslau radio station in Germany premiered Werner Milch and Friedrich Wilhelm Bischoff's *Hallo! Hier Welle Erdball!* (1928), an audio piece that combined four previously recorded albums 'as a testing ground onto stereophonic disc'.[3] A different version of the same work would be broadcast again in 1930, together with Walter Ruttman's notorious sound-collage *Weekend* — one of the first attempts at an artistic composition that relied on an optical recording procedure, following the version perfected by the Tri-Ergon Company just some years before. These two radio-artworks have repeatedly been interpreted as the starting points of the tradition of *Film-Hoerspiele* or, as a critic of that time put it, 'films without moving images'.[4]

On March 1926, just two years after the first official radio transmissions in Italy, the National Broadcasting Company's agency *Radiorario* hosted an article named 'Acoustic Film and Radiophonic Literature' by the poet Mario Vugliano. In it he makes a direct comparison between the early age of cinema and the first years of radio, suggesting that the two media would grow together on parallel paths.

> Just like cinema, to begin with radio took advantage — as it still does now — of the 'materials' that were conceived for the other arts: literature and music. But every art has its own style, which simply does not suit the others: just as the cinematographer — who has a visual way of thinking — gradually rejected chapters of novels and dialogue from stage plays and instead created visual literature, so radio, especially in foreign countries, is now looking for what we can call a microphonic style. […] The acoustic film consists in uttering sounds that can make the ear feel the same sensations as those felt by the eye in front of cinematographic images.[5]

Vugliano later dismissed these experimentations as 'phonotechnical witticisms' or 'suburban fairground attractions', being convinced that 'radio will unfold its unpredictable possibilities and outline its own technique'[6] only when it faces the challenge of telling a story or staging a drama. Differently from the previous

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[2] Stephen Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 83–84.
[3] Daniel Gilfillan, *Pieces of Sound: German Experimental Radio* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 76–77. For a recent contribution on Ruttman's intermedial approach in *Weekend* see Andy Birtwistle, 'Photographic Sound Art and the Silent Modernity of Walter Ruttmann's *Weekend* (1930)', *The New Soundtrack*, 6.2 (2016), 109–127.
[4] Ivi, p. 77.
[5] Mario Vugliano, 'Pellicola acustica e letteratura radiofonica', *Radiorario*, 2.18 (May 1926), p. 1. (My translation. From now all translations from the Italian are the author's own.)
[6] A few months later, an updated version of the article — featuring references to the Irish essayist Clive Staple Lewis' *Broadcasting from Within* and to the *pièce radiophonique* 'Mare Moto' by the French playwrights Pierre Cusy and Gabriel Germinet — was published in the same magazine, significantly renamed *Radiotheatre*. See Mario Vugliano, 'Radioteatro', *Radiorario*, 2.36 (September 1926), p. 4.

examples, such a conception of 'acoustic film' did not involve the use of any actual 'film':[7] Vugliano used the word as a synonym for cinema, essentializing the art of moving images as 'a visual way of thinking' and its aural counterpart as 'a test to see through sound'.[8] A similar synesthetic task was suggested in 1930 by the theatre and film director Anton Giulio Bragaglia:

> someone provided the examples of the way in which the audience learns to under-stand cinema, and how a bi-dimensional sense of sight has grown, relying on a subconscious convention; in similar ways, new sensory abilities would be acquired by radio listeners, in order to overcome those absences which are instead the real treasure of this new mean of expression.[9]

Bragaglia then imagined radio listeners as 'an immense crowd of régisseurs/spectators',[10] capable of creating the show by themselves using the means of an inner vision to aid their sense of hearing. Radio listening becomes, in these terms, an even stronger 'visual way of thinking'.

This brief and patchy overview necessarily does not mete the ambitious aim of retracing all of the exchanges that occurred between radio and cinema as emerging media.[11] Nevertheless, the aforementioned examples aim to raise several well acknowledged historical notions by adopting a slightly different question: has an idea of cinema as an entirely aural art (i.e. sound cinema as 'cinema made of sound') ever come up in media history? The mere facts that film *was* at some point a support used in radio stations, and that a term such as the 'radio-film' repetitively entered the vocabulary of practitioners and theoreticians, make this path a concrete historical possibility. Since the analysis of this article will mainly focus on the Italian case, my starting point will be the ideas expressed by Vugliano and Bragaglia concerning radio as a 'medium for the inner vision'. It will retrace their concrete applications in the history of the Italian radio-play, from the earliest examples to the moment when sound-on-film technologies entered radio production as technical support. By exploring the ways in which a cinematic imagination has affected the development of entertainment genres in radio production, this essay will demonstrate how a hypothesis of aural cinema as a radio art can be grounded in several concrete aesthetic and technological intermedial exchanges.

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[7] German experimentations in 'acoustic films' included the first work of Hoerspiele pioneer Alfred Braun.
[8] Vugliano, 'Pellicola acustica e letteratura radiofonica', p. 1.
[9] Anton Giulio Bragaglia, *Sottopalco. Saggi sul teatro* (Florence: Barulli e Figlio, 1937), p. 135.
[10] Ivi, p. 128.
[11] In this respect, my reflection builds on Paola Valentini's insights on how radio paved the way for the reception of sound cinema in Italy. See Paola Valentini, *Presenze sonore. Il passaggio al sonoro in Italia tra cinema e radio* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007).

In order to do so, I will rely on two different understanding of intermediality. The first refers to an epistemological horizon and a historiographical approach, as formulated by Fickers, Aalbers, Jacobs and Bijsterveld: intermediality in this sense, is not only a theoretical category for the study of the complex interrelations among different media forms and their intramedia reference, but also a lived reality where new cultural practices emerge'.[12] The second is the notion of 'intermediality as a state of historical transition', theorized by Rick Altman: the search of a single medium for its specificity and the establishment of its specific identity is historicized in the passage from an intermedial instability to an all-encompassing state of multimediality.

> L'intermédialité devrait désigner, à mon avis, une étape historique, un état transitoire au cours du quel une forme en voie de devenir un média à part entière se trouve encore partagée entre plusieurs médias existants, à un point tel que sa propre identité reste en suspens. […] Car le système proposé ici ne se limite pas au seul cinéma: au contraire, il s'applique au double mouvement d'inscription et d'eirfacement de l'intermédialité propre à l'introduction de toute nouvelle technologie.[13]

Similar concepts were further elaborated by André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion in their theory of the double birth of a medium. Relying on the prototype of early cinema, they offer a general model that prescribes multiple stages of the life-span of each medium, where the appearance of a new technological process is followed by the emergence of particular procedures and, as a final step, by the constitution and institutionalization of an established medium. Along this process, new media, which are at first received as 'a new way of presenting already well-established entertainment genres' and an 'extension of earlier practices',[14] are born again when they finally find their 'medium-specific expression capable of disassociating the medium from other media or generic 'expressibles' that have already been distinguished and are being practiced'.[15] In Gaudreault and Marion's vision, the search for a distinctive expressive feature goes hand in hand with technological and institutional development: the spheres of institutionalized discourse, semiotic means of expression and materials, technological apparatuses and technological means of dissemination variously contribute in defining the medium's identity with respect to other media.[16]

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[12] Andreas Fickers, Jasper Albers, Andres Jacobs, Katrin Bijsterveld, 'Sounds Familiar: Intermediality and re-mediation in the written, sonic and audiovisual narratives of Berlin Alexanderplatz', in *Soundscapes of the Urban Past: Staged Sound as Mediated Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Karin Bijsterveld (Buelefed: Transcript Verlag, 2007), p. 81.

[13] Rick Altman, 'De l'intermédialité au multimédia: cinéma, médias, avènement du son', *Cinemàs*, 10.1 (1999), 37–53 (pp. 38, 51).

[14] André Gaudreault, Philippe Marion, 'A Medium is Always Born Twice…', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 3.1 (2005), 3–15 (p. 4).

[15] Ivi, p. 3.

[16] Ivi, p. 6.

Within these theoretical frameworks, my analysis will start from the discursive formation of the radio-play genre during the 'constitutive' period of Italian radio (the first decade of its history as a mass medium, from 1925 to 1935), providing the two key-terms *fonoquadro* (which, as will be explained, had the double meaning of 'phonoscene' and 'phonoframe') and *suonomontaggio* ('sound-montage') with some contextualization. More specifically, this study will retrace the search for medium-specific artistic expression by analysing several articles — published on the EIAR (Italian Institution for Radiophonic Auditions) periodicals *Radiorario* and *RadioCorriere* as well as in other newspapers or cultural magazines — which directly questioned the existence of a radio art. At first, the majority of practitioners, writers or intellectuals who took part in the debate considered dramas aired on the radio as a (more or less legitimate) extension of theatre with new technological means.[17] In this same challenge against other 'expressibles', as will be argued below, cinema played a quite different role: its presence as a term of comparison was more rarely addressed than the theatre, however it can nonetheless be inferred in the lexicon and the techniques of some radio productions. An insight into both the discursive dimension and the material practices in use at that time could therefore provide an overview of how radio observed cinema while searching for its own expressive form.

From the Aural Scene to the Sonic Frame. Building the Fonoquadro

The term '*fonoquadro*' emerged alongside the very first attempts to stage a drama that was prepared specifically for the radio: the original radio-play, Luigi Chiarelli's *L'anello di Teodosio* [Theodosius's Ring] was broadcast in November 1929, and officially introduced as 'a radio-comedy in thirty *fonoquadri*'.[18] Three years later, Alessandro De Stefani used an almost identical term — '*quadro acustico*' — to present his work *La dinamo dell'eroismo* ['The Bravery Engine'], the second original play to be premiered on the national frequencies, on 3 October 1932. The Italian word *quadro* has itself an 'intermedially' ambiguous meaning, as it may refer both to a theatrical and a cinematographic realm. In the former it indicates a smaller division of the act, a narrative unity (a 'scene'), in the latter it corresponds to a spatial and temporal unity of representation (a 'frame'). Strictly speaking, there is evidently no actual equivalent of the cinematographic frame that could possibly occur during the staging of a dramatic representation, whether it takes place in a radio studio or not. However, according to Bragaglia, the increasing number of stage plays organized in *quadri* at that time indicated specifically the willingness of theatre to compete against the modes of representation introduced by film art. As he would later recall:

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[17] Enzo Ferrieri promoted an 'inquiry on radiotheatre' in the pages of the theatrical magazine *Convegno*, 8 August 1931.

[18] N.a., 'Una novità di Luigi Chiarelli a 1Mi e 1TO: "L'anello di Teodosio"', *Radiorario*, 8.46 (November 1929), p. 4.

Quadri, then, means lightness, fantasy, multiplicity, a revolving stage: theatre wants to speed up its pace. To say 'to act' will soon equate to saying 'oppressive, slow, boring, stifling, tedious, tiresome'. It is something we started to say fifteen years ago […]. The revolution in the stage techniques mostly deals with the representational rhythm: a question of time, rather than space […] In the era of cinema, the theatre too must keep pace with accelerating representations of our time.[19]

The theorist of photodynamism stated that theatre could have equated cinema only by fastening its mode of representation. From this perspective, the notion of 'scene' was valuable as a mere unit of duration, for its rhythmical functions rather than/as well as the strictly narrative ones. As a 'one dimensional medium', radio could not help but to inherit such an enhanced temporal dimension: the unfolding of a radio-piece structure 'in "almost scenic" sequences, differently placed through time and space' eases the perception of the passing of time in a more 'concrete', 'tangible form', since it is organized in 'discrete spatiotemporal blocks' instead of passing in a constant flow.[20] To put it in simpler words: given that it cannot provide visual evidence of a given space in a given time, the entire aural representation depends on how sonic elements are ordered throughout time. As a consequence, early writings for radio tried to take advantage of these specificities by referring to the notion of *fonoquadro* as a spatiotemporal unit rather than as an autonomous narrative section (i.e., more as a 'phono-frame' than as a 'phono-scene'). In both aforementioned radio-plays, the *fonoquadri* followed one another, often marked by changes of settings. *L'anello di Teodosio*'s plot — three detectives chasing two imaginary thieves in an international scenario — was, according to the Italian radio historian Malatini, nothing more than 'an excuse to exploit the specific capabilities of the radio to easily and quickly displace the action from one location to another, using noises to provide clues'.[21] All the (admittedly disparate) locations where the drama took place ('hotels, an ocean liner travelling from Geneva to New York, a movie theatre, a theatre, a bar, the inside of an elevator…')[22] allowed for clearly acoustic, sometimes musical, characterizations. The characters run from an opera theatre to a jazz club, often passing through a stereotypical array of urban sounds ('street noises, the cries of the paperboys selling *L'Eco di Genova*, streetcar bells, train whistles, car horns').[23] As is proven by the several redundant lines in the dialogues ('We have just arrived in Geneva'; 'Now we have stopped in front of a theatre…'),[24] the writer was more concerned with the construction of a diegetic space than with narrative coherence itself.

[19] Bragaglia, p. 39.
[20] Angela Ida De Benedictis, *Radiodramma e arte radiofonica. Storia e funzioni della musica per radio in Italia* (Turin: EDT, 2007), p. 83.
[21] Franco Malatini, *Cinquant'anni di teatro radiofonico in Italia 1929-1979* (Turin: ERI-RAI, 1981), p. 21.
[22] N.a.,'Una novità di Luigi Chiarelli a 1Mi e 1TO: "L'anello di Teodosio"', p. 4.
[23] Quoted in Malatini, p. 22.
[24] Ibidem.

Two years later, Alessandro De Stefani — who had been working both as a playwright and a screenwriter — further enriched the definition of the *fonoquadro* by using almost cinematographic terms. While commenting on his work, *La dinamo dell'eroismo*, he specified that 'street noises and night noises, sounds coming from a tavern, an aerodrome, an anarchist club and a fire will interchange in a fast sequence of acoustic scenes [*quadri*] in order to recall those places'.[25] Moreover, he clearly underlined the intermingling of narrative development and the listener's experience of fictional space: 'The audience is required to follow the characters as they move from one place to another, and this movement, this different perspective, must be rendered with a different shading of noise'.[26] Further notes on the script detailed the composition of the *fonoquadri* and provided a prescription of how a given sound should move from the background to the foreground, or the other way round ('Electric bells, urban street noises, speakers, advertising, fast and fleeting sensations; then the noise of the city diminishes and fades away, as though swallowed by a dense fog; eventually, a voice emerges from total silence').[27] Whereas the listeners could sometimes infer their point of audition from the specifics of what they heard (as another note on the script reads: 'we can hear [car] noises very well because the windows are presumed to be open'),[28] more often they had to discover their coordinates in the diegetic space hearing one sound at the time. Most of the doors and the windows that are repeatedly slammed, being alternatively closed or opened in both Chiarelli's and De Stefani's plays, serve no other function than that of gradually revealing to the listeners where the action is taking place. As De Stefani wrote: 'One must be able to see and to recognize the places, the people and even their gestures by counting on the only clues coming from the "environment" and the dialogues'.[29]

Shortly after the broadcast of the radio-plays, the editorial staff of the National Radio magazine *RadioCorriere* (as it was named at the time) asked the listeners to provide feedback by submitting reviews. In order to respond to those critics who lamented that the plot had no inner logic and the characters lacked any sense of reality, the editors clearly specified that the main purpose of these experimentations was not to provide a 'realistic representation', but to 'assemble a set of impressions that could suggest, through simple acoustic means, the sight of a place or an action'.[30] The impressionistic and synesthetic task of a 'truly radiophonic comedy' could then be considered fulfilled, as long as almost all

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[25] The author's reflections, which originally appeared on *RadioCorriere*, March 1932, p. 3, were republished as 'La dinamo dell'eroismo. Commedia radiofonica di Alessandro De Stefani' in the journal *Cinema Studio*, 3.11–12 (July-December 1993), p. 37. Together with the text of script (pp. 38–77). The following quotations will make reference to this version.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] Ivi, p. 57.
[28] Ivi, p. 41.
[29] Ivi p. 37.
[30] N.a.,'I giudizi critici degli ascoltatori su La dinamo dell'eroismo', *RadioCorriere*, 8.10 (March 1932), p. 3.

the listeners appreciated how 'you do not need your sight to enter the many settings where the radio-comedy takes place. Your hearing is enough',[31] 'to one of our critics the impression was so strong that he could even feel the smell of the tavern through the transmission'.[32] To prove further their point, the editors of *RadioCorriere* reported the opinion of an unusual listener. Professor Musella, 'blind since his infancy', gave a definitive confirmation about the efficiency of the sonic representation by stating: 'I felt like I was attending a theatrical play and a sound film at the same time'.[33]

Conversely, the engineers of the 'sonic staging' at the radio stations in Milan and Turin played a significantly different role from that of sound-makers on theatrical productions or silent movie projections. To face the 'specific problems owed to the reproduction of the infinite number of sounds and noises that compose the *fonoquadri*'[34] meant not only to look after the strictly material qualities of sounds, in order to provide an adequate acoustic backdrop (known among the German *Hoerspiele* practitioners with the specific name of *Geräuschkulisse*). Instead of synchronizing their movements to the lines spoken by the actors, so as to add aural information or enhance the believability of what the audience was already seeing on a stage or on a screen, they were required to 'build' the surroundings in the scene or in the frame anew, to make them 'visible' to the listening audience. Since they act both as stage technicians and set designers at one time, their task was not to 'stage', in its literal sense of 'putting something on the stage'; rather, they had to 'put something between the scenes, put it into action'.[35] As Valentini notes, in reference to the same examples: 'what is at stake here, is not just the construction of a mere décor de bruits, but also complex work on the sonic perspective, simultaneities and sequences which would ultimately have contributed to the presentation of a proper soundscape'.[36]

Though still far from being a proper 'unit', the *fonoquadro* rapidly lost the meaning that it originally held, as a narrative section, and gradually came to constitute an abstract notion that mirrored all the semantic overlaps that occur during the construction of a new media. Nevertheless, we can assume that the term had at least a two practical functions: on the one hand, by implying that writing a radio-play equated to writing a script for a theatre without a scene, or for a film which had no images, it allowed playwrights to re-imagine their work. On the other, it helped to organize — or rather, 'to frame' — the experience of the listeners throughout a rhythmical structure.

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[31] Ivi, p. 4.
[32] Ibidem.
[33] Ibidem.
[34] N.a., 'Una novità di Luigi Chiarelli a 1Mi e 1TO: "L'anello di Teodosio"', p. 4.
[35] Bragaglia, p. 20.
[36] Valentini, p. 95.

Sound Montage and the Need for Technical Dramaturgy

> We used to recreate the sound of the wind by spinning a wooden wheel, while a few small lead spheres were supposed to imitate the sound of the sea, taking cue from the most conventional tradition. We usually looked for the right corner in the room so to obtain an echo effect. Within a space of twenty square meters we collected an armoury of touching noises […]. Oh, the lost innocence of radio, the passion of youth! As a sign of progress, all of that world has now been replaced with many black records, well aligned in packages, each with a different label on it: 'train', 'army', 'thunderstorm', 'disaster', like the burnt down fables in a mourning dress.[37]

As the director of the first staging of *L'anello di Teodosio* and the tireless promoter of the debate on radio-theatre, Enzo Ferrieri nostalgically mourned the early times of the radio-play. What used to be the prerogative of the 'director/noise intoner', as he called it — to broadcast radio scripts by 'sticking to the chosen rhythm' and discarding 'anything that does not belong to 'the uniform sonic material, which is exclusively composed by words, noises, sounds and music'[38] — were then partially superseded by new technologies. Though recorded music had constituted a significant part of transmission schedules since their beginning, only in the mid-thirties did sound recording complete the technological apparatus of Italian radio. In 1933, the publicly owned record label C.E.T.R.A. was founded as an extension of the EIAR society in order to serve two main functions. First, it acted as a publishing company, recording and producing orchestras, theatrical companies or the artists that were already employed by the National Institution for Radio broadcasting. Second, some of its record-pressing machines were placed at the radio stations in Turin and Rome for internal production purposes.[39] Unlike those that were produced for the mass market, these records could be broadcast immediately after having been pressed. Before 1935, technological equipment was enriched by the introduction of both optical and magnetic recording systems. Due to the advantages and disadvantages of their technical specificities (no recording time limits versus the long lasting chemical processes required), the two Selenophone U7 apparatuses placed in the stations of Rome and Turin were only used to record those transmissions which were considered to be worth preserving. Conversely, almost every station employed a Blattnerphone steel tape recorder: since it could be employed repeatedly and facilitated 'erasures, corrections and superimpositions', it allowed for a trial-and-error process.[40] Sound recording technologies came to represent a new means of radio dissemination, preservation and production together, that deeply affected

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[37] Enzo Ferrieri, 'Il regista radiofonico', *RadioCorriere*, 26.41 (October 1949), p. 30.
[38] Ivi, p. 30.
[39] See Luca Cerchiari, *Jazz e fascismo. Dalla nascita della radio a Gorni Kramer* (Palermo: L'Epos, 2003), pp. 23–24.
[40] EIAR, *Annuario dell'anno XIII. Dieci anni di radio in Italia* (Turin: Società Editrice Torinese, 1935), pp. 161–68.

the productive practices and routines behind different pre-established genres (such as sport chronicles, journalistic reportage, the transmission of institutional speeches, etc.)

During the same years, a brand new word made its appearance on the pages of *Radiocorriere*: two radio-works aired on 13 February 1934, called '*suono-montaggi*' ['sound montages'], were broadcast during the 'G.U.F Radio Hour', a programme that disseminated the creative efforts of Groups organized by the Fascist regime in Italian Universities.[41] While taking part in the newly established cultural-artistic competition *Littoriali della Cultura e dell'Arte*, every group of students was allowed to fill a one-hour time transmission per week, presenting their works from the nearest radio station.[42] In *La fontana malata* ['The Sick Fountain'] and *In linea* ['On the Line'], both by Renato Castellani and Livio Castiglioni, sound montage indicated simultaneously a new expressive form and an innovative technical practice borrowed from film production.

> Consider the loudspeaker not as a means for reproducing or disseminating plays, which can be technologically perfected day after day, but as an instrument capable of producing sound. Such a perspective opens up an entirely new field for the radio transmissions, not so different from the one encountered by the camera and the movie camera when they were no longer used as simple means of diffusion but as new artistic tools. The obvious comparison between sound and image led the young students from the G.U.F. in Milan while composing their work: they called it sound montage by analogy with the editing process, which converts the 'documentary pieces' shot in studio in the harmonic entirety of 'film'.[43]

La fontana malata was an acoustic interpretation of a poem of the same name written in 1904 by Aldo Palazzeschi. As the author is often considered to be a forerunner of the futurist aesthetics, his anti-subjectivist poetics of 'impersonality' and the intensive use of onomatopoeia in the literary text allowed the two young students to have an inanimate object acting as the main character in their aural drama. Gradually, the sound of water drops is surrounded by the noise of the courtyard (a young boy taking piano lessons, an old man playing arias from a Verdi's opera with an harmonica, some school kids spelling aloud, etc.), until 'the evening comes and the fountain is alone again, dreaming and regretting the past times'.[44] Excluding the 'weeping and coughing' of the fountain, all the sonic events in the piece were specifically written for the radio adaptation and juxtaposed in order to give the impression of a soundscape evolving throughout different moments of the day. The Fascist-inspired *In linea* was an even more abstract, almost musical composition, arranged over three moments: the untied

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[41] See Luca La Rovere, 'Fascist Groups in Italian Universities: An Organization at the Service of the Totalitarian State', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34.3 (July 1999), 457–75.
[42] N.a.,'I Littoriali della Cultura e dell'Arte', *RadioCorriere*, 12.9 (February 1936), p. 11.
[43] N.a., 'I suonomontaggi del Guf Milano', *RadioCorriere*, 10.74 (February 1934), p. 10.
[44] Ibidem. See also Malatini, p. 39.

and low sounds of the first part become gradually concise in a 'straight sonorous movement', and are then resolved in the final part through the appearance of a voice that resembles Mussolini's.[45] According to *RadioCorriere*, the plot was a metaphor of a 'righteous' education: 'after having struggled to nail a simplicity and reality that he could not grasp, a man encounters the fascist doctrine'.[46] Months later, Renato Castellani employed again the sound montage technique for another celebratory piece *La battaglia del Piave* ['The Battle on the Piave River'], which is officially presented as a 'radio-synthesis' and aired nationwide on 18 June 1934.[47] This patriotic, commemorative occasion gave to the author a chance to invoke the First World War battle between the Italian and the Austrian armies, by means of a series of acoustic impressions: the quiet flow of the river and the soldiers' whispers overnight suddenly gave way to the explosion of a sonic warfare, where the human voices alternatively 'get lost like leaves in a hurricane', 'engage a duel against each other while the artilleries fight' and finally 'find themselves again in a choral resonance'. Then 'the realism of telegraphic transmissions weaves in the tremendous orchestra of the battle',[48] finally announcing that the enemy's attack has failed.

Castellani himself highlighted the discontinuities from former attempts in radio drama (which he compares to 'theatrical representation on a revolving stage' with short acts, short dialogues and fast changing scenes), and provided a little theorization of his working methods. Radiophonic representation, he wrote, 'must be an open window on the wider field of sound, choral in its essence, not for some abstract speculations on the specificities of radio, but as a result of the systematization of the technical necessities underlying the realization of any work'.[49] According to his conception, the foregrounding of the sonic landscape 'as the leading actor', as well as the implicit underplay of the strictly narrative components, came as a direct consequence of the possibilities disclosed by the manipulation of recorded sound. During an interview years later — when he was already a well known film director — he emphasized how these ideas were related to the search for a medium-specific expression: 'It came to my mind that radio, which until then had been used as a means of dissemination, could turn out to be also a means of expression, if one was allowed to take the raw material of sound, record, elaborate, manipulate and edit it'.[50]

Castellani's considerations resemble strikingly the experimentations with sound-on-film technologies that had taken place in Germany and in the Soviet Union just some years before. Although he never explicitly mentions them, he appears almost

[45] See Valentini, p. 94.

[46] N.a., 'I suonomontaggi del Guf Milano', p. 10.

[47] N.a.,'La battaglia del Piave', *RadioCorriere*, 10.26 (June 1936), p. 3.

[48] Ibidem.

[49] Quoted in Gi.Mi., 'Spettacolo Corale', *RadioCorriere*, 10.50 (December 1934), p. 4.

[50] Quoted in Aldo Zappalà, 'Alla radio il cinema eternamente grato' in *La radio. Storia di sessant'anni. 1924/1984*, ed. by Peppino Ortoleva and Franco Monteleone (Turin: ERI Edizioni Rai, Piemonte Vivo, Crt, 1984), pp. 180–87 (p. 185).

to quote Walter Ruttmann's 1929 '*Ars Acustica*' manifesto ('All the audible in the world becomes material')[51] and to share Bishoff's conviction that 'acoustic dramaturgy is unthinkable without technical dramaturgy'.[52] Moreover, despite being inspired by a different ideology, his understanding of radio-art was related to the 'radio ear' theorized by Vertov in the *Kino-Pravda and Radio-Pravda* manifesto, which stated that the primary aim of the radio was to broadcast 'audible phenomena'[53] captured from the workers' real life rather than operas or symphonies.

What is even more relevant to this analysis is the way in which this conception of radio-drama re-configured the relationship with cinema. In an article significantly entitled 'Radio Takes Lessons from Cinema', Castellani explicitly compares cinema and radio both as technological media and art forms. The two apparatuses are outlined in an essential transmitter-receiver model (camera — projector *versus* microphone — speaker), and the specificity of 'simultaneity' on the radio is dismissed as an inessential feature for true artistic expression. Castellani argues that as long as the tasks of the medium are limited to reporting/transmitting the aural portion of an event taking place somewhere else, radio listening will be considered as a secondary activity — or, in the particular case of radio-play, a 'surrogate of live theatre'.[54] In order to develop its own expressive form, radio must follow the example of cinema as a purely visual art:

> it is *the silent film of radio* (a purely aural spectacle) that we must look for [...] In fact, the 'sound-spectacle' has been potentially achievable since the advent of the gramophone, but only the film soundtrack enables its concrete existence, thanks to an efficient montage technique.[55]

The article goes on to provide practical advice on how to obtain an alternate montage à la Griffith by 'shortening the film soundtrack from a three meters to, let's say, a one meter length' and 'gradually raising the volume into a crescendo and a purely sonic emotion'. The author concludes that the few conventional elements that allow the comprehension of a similar art form will be acquired by the spectators 'at least as quickly as they did with the passages from a long shot to a close up during the early years of silent cinema'.[56]

[51] Walter Ruttmann [1929], 'A New Approach to Sound Film and Radio, Programme for a photographic Sound Art' / 'Neue Gestaltung von Tonfilm und Funk. Programm einer photographischen Hörkunst', in *Walter Ruttmanns Tonmontagen als Ars Acustica*, ed. by Jeanpaul Goergen, (Siegen: Universität Gesthochschule Siegen, 1994), pp. 25–26 (p. 25). For an extended dissertation about the use of montage in German radio-plays see Antje Vowinckel, *Collagen im Hörspiel. Die Entwicklung einer radiophonen Kunst* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995).
[52] Quoted in Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Radio, Film and the Death of the Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 89.
[53] Vertov, pp. 96–97.
[54] Renato Castellani, 'La radio a lezione dal cinematografo', *Cinema*, 1.12 (1936), pp. 465–66.
[55] Ibidem [emphasis in the original]
[56] Ibidem.

Conclusions

Some general observations can be made in the light of this overview. The first concerns the way in which the development of the radio-play traced out here mirrors an evolving conception of the medium and its specificities through a constant comparison to cinema. Since it was seen at first as an essentially 'real time' medium, radio found itself associated to live theatrical staging: it is then not surprising to see how radio dramatic production were often defined in essentially pejorative terms ('one dimensional theatre' or 'theatre for blind people'), i.e. defining the contours of the medium's opacity as evidences of its technical limitations. Broadcasting stage plays acoustically would deprive them of 1) the physical presence of the audience as a collective entity in front of the stage, and 2) all of the sensorial channels of perception except for hearing. In this first phase, cinema helped as a useful term for comparison, it being an art of 'illusionary perception'. In the same way that the juxtaposition of still images (frames/*quadri*) could provide the illusion of movement in a spatiotemporal continuum, so assembled sounds of different durations (*fonoquadri*) could create an illusionary, synesthetic impression of visual space. At a later stage, as soon as sound film and other audio-recording technologies emerged, the analogy with cinema was renewed in view of material consistency: 'sound montages' revealed how the mediation of radio could consist of multiple stages, rigidly distinguishing the technical issues related to the creation of a piece from those strictly bounded to its broadcasting. The aesthetization of the sound-spectacle as an 'art of post-production' relied on a new temporal and epistemological dimension, which would shortly after prove to be pivotal in other radio genres too, for aesthetic manipulation as well as for censorship interventions.[57]

Focusing on an aesthetical dimension, it is furthermore worth noting that the aims of older radio-plays (to make the listener 'see through sound', not to mention the rhythmical organization of listening) became exaggerated through the application of sound montage techniques. In a sense, the more similar the working methods grew on a material level, the more abstract the comparison with cinema became. Whereas at first radio could not resist reference to sound cinema (i.e. 'the talking film') as its ideal counterpart, the employment of sound film (i.e., sound-on-film-technologies) allowed Castellani to talk use 'the silent film of radio' as a metaphor for a purely mono-sensorial form of art. Within this process, the definition of 'radio-film' changed as the terms of the analogy with cinema shifted from one idea of the radio-film (a radio work that sounds like a talking film *without* moving images) to another (a radio-work that features recorded sound-on-film *instead* of moving images). Paradoxically, by employing the same technological means as the film medium and by constantly referring to cinema

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[57] See EIAR, *Annuario dell'anno XIII. Dieci anni di radio in Italia* (Turin: Società Editrice Torinese, 1935), pp. 161–68.

as an art, radio sought to emancipate itself and to develop a symmetrical — and therefore equally respectable — expressive form.

One could provide further reflection on the intermedial concept of cinema as a radio art by expanding this focus to an international scale. For instance, Rudolf Arnheim's radio writings in the same years took stock of most of the topics that have been analysed here. He addressed radio as 'the countermedium of silent film'[58] and advocated the use of editable sound recordings for spatial and temporal manipulation. Moreover, his conception of 'sound drama' as a particular form of radio-play, which represented the 'possibility of a compelling aural art form drawn from the materials of radio but with broader applicability for film, as well',[59] was not so different from the examples of radio-film mentioned here. However, the various references he made to the 'radio film' as a 'hybrid creature' are in fact allusions to the television medium[60] (radio-film as 'the broadcasting of sounds and moving images', once again without necessarily involving a film stock) therefore further complicating the picture, and making the study of such intermedial notions an even more challenging task.

[58] Rudolf Arnheim, 'Confessions of a Maverick,' *Salmagundi*, 78-79 (Spring/Summer 1988), p. 50.
[59] Rudolf Arnheim, *Film*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), pp. 215–16. For an overview on Arnheim's intermedial thought, see Shawn Vancour, 'Arnheim on Radio: *Materialtheorie* and Beyond', in *Arnheim for Film and Media Studies*, ed. by Scott Higgins (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 177–94.
[60] Rudolf Arnheim, 'Radio-Film', in *The Promise of Cinema: German Film Theory*, *1907–1933*, ed. by Anton Kaes, Nicholas Baer and Michael Cowan (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 602–03.