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Ecco la radio: Music, Media, and Politics in Fascist Italy

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Ecco la radio: Music, Media, and Politics in Fascist Italy

By

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Professor Mary Ann Smart, Chair
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Abstract

Italian radio was politicized from the first broadcast of a speech by Mussolini in 1925. The dictator's thunderous voice may have sought domination over the airwaves, but in the only Western nation where radio broadcasting evolved under a totalitarian government, the vast majority of broadcasting hours was devoted to entertainment. Far from being apolitical, radio transmissions of music and theater were central players in fascism's culture industry, shaped both by the profit-driven strategies of media enterprises and by the emotional investment and listening habits of consumers. In this dissertation, through analysis of musical scores, recordings, films and unpublished archival materials, I demonstrate that radio during fascism sought to immerse listeners within a statist fantasy, and that cultural broadcasts were not only political, but themselves generated fascist ideas and discourse. I argue that we cannot understand either fascism's historical role or its lingering presence in global politics and culture without understanding the ways in which it was mediated by and through radio.

For Kela
1934–2018

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Abbreviations

CETRA	Compagnia per edizioni, teatro, registrazioni ed affini
EIAR	Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche
LUCE	L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa (Istituto LUCE)
MAMI	Mostra autarchica del Minerale italiano
MinCulPop	Ministero della Cultura Popolare
OND	Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro
PNF	Partito Nazionale Fascista
RAI	Radio Audizioni Italiane
URI	Unione Radiofonica Italiana

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Berkeley, California. August 2020.

Introduction

The tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, the demonstration in 1922 that led to the rise of the Italian Fascist Party and Benito Mussolini, was a day of celebration. October 28, the date of the march, had been an official holiday since the first anniversary in 1923, and its annual commemoration generated a repertoire of political rituals that the regime would continue to rehearse throughout its two decades of power, which became known as the fascist *ventennio*.[1]

Alongside festivals and parades occurring throughout the nation in 1932, a more ethereal celebration was taking place. During a day marked—as one commentator put it—not by "commemorations" but by "consecrations," the Duce formally inaugurated a new radio transmitter in Milan. The move was celebrated throughout the day on the stations of the Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche (EIAR), the national radio broadcasting arm of the fascist regime, which punctuated its regular daily broadcasts with news coverage of the celebrations. When Mussolini opened the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution in Rome, EIAR's microphones broadcast his speeches to listeners at home and to the network's many speakers, suspended in squares or traveling throughout the city strapped to trucks.[2] In the evening, listeners could select from variety of patriotic broadcasts: an opera by Giuseppe Blanc, the composer of the fascist anthem "Giovinezza," titled *La valle degli eroi*; a concert of patriotic hymns and choruses; and one of two performances of canonic Italian operas, *Il barbiere di Siviglia* by Gioachino Rossini and *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini. At the time of the original March on Rome in 1922, Italy had yet to establish a national broadcasting system, a fact that led to concerns that the nation was lagging behind its neighbors.[3] Yet a mere decade after the birth of the

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[1] The role of public celebrations and political spectacles during fascism, and particularly of the changing nature of the annual commemoration of the March on Rome, has been investigated by Mabel Berezin; see her *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[2] Alberto Casella, "Il Duce mette in moto la nuova trasmitente milanese," *Radiocorriere*, Oct. 29–Nov. 5, 1932, 12.

[3] By the time Fascism rose to power in Italy, radio broadcasting had been firmly established in other countries, notably the United States (1917), France (1921), the United Kingdom (1922), and Germany (1923). At the same time, other technologies for recording and transmitting sound—including the microphone, telephone, and phonograph—were also seeing rapid developments and experimentation.

totalitarian regime, radio had become both a central platform for documenting and transmitting fascism's triumphs and a shining testament to its efforts to create a modern Italian state.

In 2006, Italian media historian Gianni Isola argued, "The weakness of Italian historiography [on radio] reflects the slow development of radio in Italy—a backwardness which confirms the part played by the Peninsula as 'the feeblest link' of industrialized agricultural countries."[4] He lamented the absence of serious critical analyses of Italian radio as well as the difficulty of studying a medium that, by its very nature, leaves behind few concrete traces. What hope there was, Isola wrote, lay in those historians willing to take into account the "music, popular songs, the few things still available about programmes, stills, catalogues, letters to the editors of dailies or reviews: everything could be useful to recreate, at least partially, the multifarious aspects of that great revolution, the coming of radio into the life of everybody," to unpack "how a new technology affected a contemporary society." Isola's concerns that Italian radio scholarship would be vulnerable to accusations of backwardness, of lagging behind the times—probably the most common epithets cast at Italy and Italians since the nineteenth-century—were not unfounded. In an Oxford bibliography of radio studies produced in 2019, a list of key academic publications on radio history fails to mention even a single work on Italian radio.[5]

There are, however, a number of reasons to be wary of the stark backwards vs. modern opposition from which Isola launched his critique. First and foremost is the difficulty of defining terms for the study of Italian radio. If the goal of the radio historian is to prove the epithet wrong—to replace the narrative of backwardness with one of development and modernization—then we run the risk of reinscribing the values of the opposition onto the historical material itself. Radio becomes the savior of the Italian state, the medium that catapulted the nation into a modernity that had otherwise been hovering just out of reach. Such a narrative fails to

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[4] As one of the most prolific scholars of Italian radio, Isola has shown how the comparatively slow development of Italian radio, at least in comparison to broadcasting in other nations, did not prevent it from having major linguistic, political and cultural effects. See Gianni Isola, *Abbassa la tua radio, per favore… Storia dell'ascolto radiofonico nell'Italia fascista* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1999); *Cari amici vicini e lontani* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1999); and his *L'ha scritto la radio: Storia e testi della radio durante il fascismo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998).
[5] Shawn VanCour, *Oxford Bibliography on Radio and Sound Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

recognize the foibles and missteps encountered by any new medium during the experimental phases of its development. The second problem with this historical vantage point is the way it maps a temporal distinction onto spatial (national) boundaries. It may seem obvious, or at least reasonable, to draw links between the radio and the nation-state, given that most European radio networks during the dawn of radio broadcasting were national services developed to support government interests.[6] However, such an equation rests on the assumption that radio waves simply stopped at national borders, which was far from the case. As early as 1925 American listeners could tune in to transmissions from the United Kingdom, and European audiences received an even wider range of stations, with Italian listeners enjoying broadcasts from Brussels, Berlin, London and Barcelona. Even so reasonable a term as "Italian listeners" becomes suspect in light of the fact that, during the medium's first two decades, its targeted audience encompassed Italians living abroad, particularly in the United States, Latin America, and North Africa, as well as those on the mainland and the surrounding islands.

In this dissertation, I aim to lay the groundwork for a history of Italian radio that moves beyond stark oppositions between tradition and modernity, or between politics and culture. Because the medium is both intermedial and international, defined by the distances between producers and listeners, broadcasts produced during fascism were always political—although not necessarily in the overtly propagandistic sense so often associated with fascist cultural production. Instead, radio broadcasts were charged with developing a theatrical, at times even operatic, Italian radio aesthetic. In the period covered by this dissertation—from 1924 to 1940—this aesthetic was the central element of a political project to define national culture, and thereby the nation (and fascism) itself, as radiophonic. Fascism's radiophonic project was ongoing throughout the twenty years of Mussolini's regime, and it took place at several discursive levels, both aural (including music, sound effects, and speech) and visual (printed images, descriptions of stage scenery). In tracing the formation of this national radio aesthetic, this project seeks a broader understanding of the material reality of radio production in fascist Italy—attending not only to the sounds

[6] One of the only existing works of scholarship that goes beyond a national model is Suzanne Lommers's work on the International Broadcasting Union and Radio Luxembourg; see her *Europe—On Air: Interwar Projects for Radio Broadcasting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

produced by the receiver, but to everything from the curtains that dampened echo in the studio to the magazines that informed listeners where to tune in and when.

Since the publication of Isola's call to arms, there has been a resurgence of interest in the history of Italian radio, primarily by scholars working in Italian. Whether this increased attention has to do with the new availability of archival material or with a renewed interest in media archaeology, these publications draw attention to the variety of scholarly approaches available to radio historians.[7] Among these are studies by Franco Monteleone and Philip Cannistraro, whose work was among the first to demonstrate the great lengths to which the regime went in order to monopolize and exploit the airwaves.[8] More recent examinations of the aesthetic aims of specific producers and artistic movements have demonstrated the heterogeneity of radio production—and reception—in Italy during fascism. Particular attention has been paid to the futurists, whose bombastic manifestos and outspoken demands for more airtime masked the movement's lack of influence over national radio production.[9] The futurists were not the only movement concerned with producing new works for the new medium: Angela Ida de Benedictis's study of RAI's Studio di Fonologia illustrates how disagreements over the nature of "modern" sound shaped music composed for the radio even after the end of the medium's golden age.[10] Such works demonstrate an interpretive flexibility purportedly suited to the study of the emerging medium.

When it comes to studying emerging radio in Italy, complications arise from Italy's unique position as the only Western nation where radio

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[7] Thanks to recent efforts by Andrea Malvano of the University of Turin and others, the music archives of the radio orchestra have recently been catalogued and partially digitized. See Malvano, "The Digital Project of the RAI Archive: Catalogue, Chronology and Study of the Italian Broadcasting Orchestra," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (February 2019): 1–14.

[8] Monteleone, *La radio italiana nel periodo fascista* (Venice: Marsilio, 1984); and his *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001); Cannistraro, "The Radio in Fascist Italy," *Journal of European Studies* 2 (1972): 127–54.

[9] See Margaret Fisher, "Futurism and Radio" in *Futurism and the Technological Imagination*, ed. Günter Berghaus (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 227–61; Arndt Niebitsch, "Cruel Media: On F. T. Marinetti's Media Aesthetics," *Annali d'Italianistica* 27 (2009): 333–48.

[10] Angela Ida de Benedictis, *Radiodramma e arte radiofonica: storia e funzioni della musica per radio in Italia* (Turin: EDT, 2004).

broadcasting evolved under a totalitarian government. Radio transmissions, whether of Mussolini's speeches or of music and theater, were central to fascism's culture industry, shaped both by the profit-driven strategies of media enterprises and by the emotional investment and listening habits of consumers. The majority of the broadcasts examined in this dissertation were not explicitly political—that is, they were not political speeches and did not overtly state their support for the regime and its policies. We might instead group them under the heading of "cultural" broadcasts of music, theater, comedy and radio plays, and other transmissions intended primarily for entertainment purposes. In research terms, of course, the term "culture" is artificial and so broad as to be generally useless. It does, however, provide a starting point by outlining, if only vaguely, the experiential dimension of musical and theatrical broadcasts; the very quality that made these broadcasts "cultural" also, paradoxically, made them the ideal instrument to disseminate political ideals and create a sense of community during the early decades of radio broadcasting.

Broadcast Culture

In 1931, Italian director and screenwriter Enzo Ferrieri prophesied a future for radio:

> Radio as a creative force will give rise to:
> 1) A new kind of journalism, which does not oppose but integrates the printed newspaper, which will create new forms of journalistic expression and, above all, create a new special radio correspondent.
> 2) Literary, dramatic, and musical works, suitable for the new medium.
> 3) Its own auditoriums, transforming them—these future theaters, concert halls, and the most important artistic events—into something transmissible to all its listeners, whether or not there is a live public audience.[11]

Ferrieri's utopian vision for radio was printed in his essay "La radio come forza creativa." The essay was the first among many manifestos composed

[11] Enzo Ferrieri, *La radio! la radio? la radio!* (Milan: Greco & Greco, 2002), 30.

by Italian directors and artists in the early 1930s that extolled the potential of the new medium. For Ferrieri, the closest thing to a radiophonic art that existed was music: "Radio's expressive mode is itself a musical one, which has for its instrument the voice of the speaker, and uses [as its notes] the words, the silences and the sounds, which by nature lend themselves to becoming symbols broad enough to be grasped by millions of listeners."[12] If this association of music with radiophonic art seems obvious, it is worth noting that the other component Ferrieri deemed essential to producing art for radio is less predictable: "Silence is the immense backdrop against which all the voices one hears on the radio elicit images, landscapes, movements, and real and fantastic events… It is from the sudden suspension [of sound]… that the thrill of expectation and terror arises during certain radio play scenes, where one eagerly awaits the solution to the drama taking place, as one waits for the news as events unfold little by little."[13] Ferrieri understood the interplay between music and silence, existence and absence in terms of its perceived effect on the listener. Through these gaps in the sound, Ferrieri claimed that the listener would be able to access, recreate, and imagine the missing image.

Ferrieri came to his manifesto with some experience in the realm of radio programming. Only two years earlier, in his work as leader of the Compagnia Stabile della Radio Italiana, he had directed the first original Italian radio drama, *L'anello di Teodosio*. The play's subtitle, "radio-comedy in thirty *fonoquadri* [sound-scenes]," defined the play as a series of scenes constructed only through sound, with the term "quadro" linking it to both live theater and film, at the time still a silent medium.[14] The farcical plot followed the high jinks of three detectives chasing two thieves across a diegetic landscape of bars, theaters, and a cruise ship traveling from Genoa to New York. These locations were constructed entirely through sound—the honking of car horns and shouting of newspaper hawkers along a Milan street, the sound of an aria from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in Genoa's Teatro Carlo Felice, and tango music performed by the ship's orchestra, to name a few. In case audiences were unable to follow the swift transitions between

[12] Ferrieri, *La radio! la radio? la radio!*, 40

[13] Ferrieri, *La radio! la radio? la radio!*, 39

[14] Simone Dotto has argued convincingly that early radio plays were grounded in cinematic aesthetic principles: Dotto, "Notes for a History of Radio-Film: Cinematic Imagination and Intermedia Forms in Early Italian Radio," *Cinema&Cie* XVI, no. 26–27 (2016): 107–120.

diegetic spaces, the characters helpfully provided narration to reinforce the sonic image: "Ah! We've stopped in front of a theater. It's the Carlo Felice." Such intense focus on illustrating the diegesis through sound—often at the expense of narrative continuity—resulted in a flimsy plot that Franco Malatini called merely "an excuse to exploit radio's specific capabilities."[15] In 1931, Alessandro de Stefani's radio play *La dinamo dell'eroismo* similarly called for sounds to illustrate diegetic space through "street noises and night noises, sounds coming from a tavern, an aerodrome, an anarchist club and a fire" to create "a fast sequence of acoustic scenes [quadri] in order to recall those places." In response to critics who claimed that diegetic sounds distracted from plot and character development, the editors claimed that the primary purpose of the work was not to create 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." Moreover, what was important was that "you do not need your sight to enter the many settings where the radio-comedy takes place. Your hearing is enough."[16] In these works, sound—whether music, sound effects, or human speech, to use the framework provided by Rudolf Arnheim—worked to compensate for the medium's blindness by illustrating setting, characters, and other basic narrative elements.[17]

The inability of audiences to see performers generated opportunities for radio works to invent characters who were near-impossible to envoice in live productions. One of the earliest and most famous examples of such characterization occurs in *Der Lindberghflug*, written by Bertolt Brecht with music by Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith for the Baden-Baden music festival in 1929. The transmission featured Charles Lindbergh contending with the voices of his foes Fog, Snowstorm, and Sleep as he attempted his

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[15] Franco Malatini, *Cinquant'anni di teatro radiofonico in Italia 1929–1979* (Turin: ERI-RAI, 1981), 21.

[16] This description as well as audience reactions to the premiere of the radio play were originally published in *Radiocorriere*, Mar. 5–12, 1932: 3. See also Dotto, "Notes for a History of Radio-Film," 113.

[17] Arnheim claimed that radio revealed an "alluring, exciting world… containing not only the most potent sensuous delights known to man—those of musical sounds, rhythm and harmony—but capable of reproducing actuality by transmitting real sounds and, what is more, commanding that most abstract and comprehensive means of expression: speech." See Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio: An Art of Sound*, trans. Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read, (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 15.

1927 solo flight across the Atlantic. The work took place in the confines of Lindbergh's small plane, within which abstract, inhuman characters took the form of voices threatening the pilot with failure. An avowed Marxist, Brecht dreamed of a future radio that would enable listeners to join in the performance, one that knew "how to receive as well as transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him."[18] Brecht intended listeners to join in the performance of the play by taking the part of the hero, Lindbergh, which they could do by reading from a score published ahead of the first performance. He believed that, through active participation, a radiophonic *Lehrstück* (or "learning play") could save its audience from becoming passive, obedient cogs in a capitalist system. During its premiere at the festival, *Der Lindberghflug* featured a split stage; on one half, the orchestra, chorus, singers, and announcers (effectively, the "inside" of the radio") and on the other half, the singer performing Lindbergh's part in casual clothes, sitting among a table and chairs, representing the listener at home.[19] There is little evidence that listeners at home sang along, and most of the festival audience remained in the theater rather than exiting to listen to the work transmitted over loudspeakers outside, as Brecht had hoped. Nevertheless, the work reveals something of the way early radio works often celebrated a symbiotic relationship between humans and machines.

The early 1930s saw the premiere of several radio dramas on Italian airwaves, including Piero Mazzolotti's award-winning *L'appuntamento in cielo*, which dramatized the radio communications between the pilots and passengers of two airplanes. Among the most vocal proponents of new writing for Italian radio was F.T. Marinetti, the founder of the futurist movement and co-writer of the 1933 "Futurist Radio Manifesto" with Pino Masnata. Like Mazzolotti's play, Marinetti's first radio drama, a children's play titled *Violetta e gli aeroplani,* had a plot reminiscent of the aviatic themes of *Der Lindberghflug*. Marketed by EIAR as a "radiophonic work… absolutely outside the usual love intrigues… entirely constructed with voices, sounds, and silences," the three-part play follows the antics of a group of Italian youths as they cavort at the seashore and clamber over

[18] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1964), 52.
[19] Alexander Rehding, "Magic Boxes and *Volksempfänger*: Music on the Radio in Weimar Germany," in *Music, Theatre and Politics in Germany: 1848 to the Third Reich*, ed. Nikolaus Bacht, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 268.

steep cliffsides.[20] Despite the play's mixed reception—in his 1938 *Panorama della radio* Enrico Rocca called it "in tutti i sensi all'acqua di rose" [lackluster in every sense]—Marinetti would continue to play a major role in Italian radio, giving regular lectures, reciting poetry (including his own *Bombardimento dell'Adrianopoli*), and narrating the live radio coverage of the 1932 homecoming of Aviation Minister Italo Balbo and his fleet of twenty-three hydroplanes (the so-called *Atlantici*) after their transatlantic flight. The style of Marinetti's narration was noted for having "a combination of sound and silence [with] its own sense of musicality," for its use of onomatopoeia as he described "varoom varoom go the motors that pass just a few meters over my head," and for the frenetic energy of the poet's easily recognizable voice.[21] The event raised futurism's standing by aligning it with Balbo's technological accomplishments and the record-breaking aeronautical feats responsible for catapulting the nation onto the world stage.[22] More importantly, it reinforced radio's potential for combining art, politics, and news into a single stream of sensory information, a quality that made it attractive both to futurism, which sought to bring to art the vitality and restlessness of modern life, and to fascism, which was in the process of transforming modern political life into a performance art.

In 1934, a new term appeared that further enriched the discussion on the role of sound in radio drama, when two new works called "suonomontaggi" [sound montages] were broadcast during the "G.U.F Radio Hour," a program established by the regime to encourage radio production at the university level.[23] True to their name, the plays by Renato Castellani and Livio Castiglioni, titled *La fontana malata* ['The Sick Fountain'] and *In linea* ['On the Line'], took the form of sound collages. In the former, the main character is an inanimate object—the fountain—whose trickles and droplets provide the background for a series of interjections from around the courtyard, including a child's piano lesson and an old man playing Verdi arias with a harmonica, until evening falls

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[20] Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas: The BBC Experiments, 1931–1933,* (Boston: MIT Press, 2002), 49.
[21] Fisher, *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas*, 10.
[22] Margaret Fisher, *Radia: A Gloss of the 1933 Futurist Radio Manifesto,* (Emeryville: Second Evening Art, 2012), 6.
[23] For more on the activities of the GUF, see Aldo Grasso, *Radio e televisione: teorie, analisi, storie, esercizi*, (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), 155.

and the fountain is left alone to reminisce about its past.[24] Unlike the dramas that preceded it, in which sound was used instrumentally to construct a setting for the action, in *La fontana malata* the soundscape is both setting and drama. Reflecting on this approach to radio drama, Castellani, who would later go on to have a successful career as a film director, wrote that "radiophonic representation must be an open window on the wider field of sound, choral in its essence."[25] As Simone Dotto has argued, Castellani's thoughts reveal a fundamentally cinematic approach to his radio writing, as does the term "sound-montage," derived from the film editing process through which scenes shot in the studio were recombined into "the harmonic entirety of 'film.'"[26]

The second of Castellani and Castiglioni's dramas reflected a similarly technical approach to the creation of a radiophonic soundscape, but in a form that was simultaneously more abstract and more political. *In linea* was a drama billed in *Radiocorriere*, the network's weekly print magazine, as a metaphor for a fascist political education. The nebulous plot followed a man encountering fascist doctrine "after having struggled to understand a simplicity and reality that he could not grasp."[27] The play was divided into three sections: the first, a series of sounds "striving for fruitlessly for resolution," including the bass drum and the "lamenting cries" of women and children, punctuated by melodic cello phrases, rising into a chorus representing "the demagogic crowd, the anticlerical crowd, the communist crowd"; the second, a percussive, precise "sonorous movement" in which "the fascist idea manifests, through the drama, the means of overcoming one's own self-preoccupation"; and finally a "calm, thoughtful" third movement concluding with a narrative voice, reminiscent of the authoritative voice of the Duce, which "recalls the possibilities of the present, summarized in the description of the new Littoriali."[28] At the heart of *In Linea* is a fervent belief in the power of the radiophonic voice, that "wonderful organ" that could work magic through "delicate technical and artistic nuances with the microphone." The cries of the panicked masses give way to the presence of such an authoritative voice, the voice of power,

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[24] "I suonomontaggi del Guf Milano," *Radiocorriere*, Feb. 11–18, 1934, 10.
[25] Translated in Dotto, "Notes for a History of Radio-Film," 117.
[26] Dotto, "Notes for a History of Radio-Film, 116.
[27] "I suonomontaggi del Guf Milano," 10.
[28] "Littoriali della cultura e dell'arte: i suonomontaggi del G.U.F. di Milano," *Radiocorriere*, Feb.25–Mar. 4, 1934, 27.

ringing through the silence, reading the words of the dictator himself.

The debate over how to compensate for the medium's lack of image by helping the listener "see through sound" would reach its conclusion with the rise of broadcast television, which in Italy would not occur until after the fall of fascism and the end of the Second World War. The need to seek medial compensation was never in question. The fodder for the debate was rather what tools and techniques best served producers who sought to illustrate the absent images for a distant listener. This "listener"—the abstract individual who would complete the circuit to produce the radiophonic image—was central to discussions about the material best suited to the acoustic, social, and technological properties of the new medium. In 1931, the same year he published "La radio come forza creativa," Ferrieri printed a survey of Italian intellectuals, titled *Inchiesta sulla radio*. Among the questions Ferrieri posed in his survey was one asking participants to describe their ideal radio listener. Futurist Anton Giulio Bragaglia advocated a new species of listener, the "régisseur-spettatore," who would listen in complete darkness, removed from the distractions of conversation and immersed in the sounds emitted by their headphones.[29] Such a listener was, however, rare among the population of EIAR subscribers, many of whom listened in groups, whether at home or in the many community centers or cafes that housed a radio receiver, often simultaneously engaged in playing games, doing housework, or some other mundane activity.

But if who was listening, and how they listened, mattered less to these theorists of Italian radio drama than what they listened for, these matters were of great concern to EIAR and to the regime. As the network's sustained efforts to increase subscriptions paid off, the nature of the radio listener became increasingly fraught. Listening to the radio was framed as a mode of participating in national ritual; live transmissions from Mussolini's speeches in Rome's Piazza Venezia featured the enthusiastic cheers of crowds, which producers hoped would evoke a sympathetic response in the radio audience. The network performed regular surveys to uncover trends in popular taste, in addition to public contests and sweepstakes to promote indirect listener participation.[30] Behind these efforts lay the fear that listeners would stop listening, step away from the radio or turn it off altogether. An ideal listener could function as both a receptor and

[29] Ferrieri, *La radio! la radio? la radio!*, 70.
[30] Cannistraro, "The Radio in Fascist Italy," 132.

disseminator of political faith and national belonging; but a less-than-ideal listener threatened to be a point of rupture, a weakness in the national network, a disruption of the signal.

Networking

A typical evening program might have looked very much like this one from January 6, 1929: news and weather reporting, followed by a brief lecture, sports news and finally the transmission of the opera trilogy *Il trittico* by Giacomo Puccini, with an intermission performance of the futurist sound-poem *La battaglia di Adrianopoli* by Marinetti. Over the past few decades scholars have shown how Mussolini's regime, once understood to be "anti-ideological" and "anti-cultural," in fact mobilized culture towards ideological ends.[31] Not only were many artists complicit with the fascist government, but public support for the regime depended in crucial ways on its ability to mobilize a politics of spectacle.[32] Radio was no exception to this rule. Nevertheless, a propaganda-focused historical model has persisted in studies of Italian radio. This is in part due to the fact that many of the extant sources were produced by the government and are preserved in government archives. The tendency to regard all radio content aired during the fascist period as propaganda also flows from a false analogy between the mechanics of broadcasting, in which content is transmitted out from a central location, and a system of political communication based on centralized control and transmission of a message. This reductive model defines broadcast content as either propagandistic or apolitical entertainment, but never both together. Moreover, it fails to account for the polyvalent nature of fascism and its multiple incarnations during the beginning of the twentieth century. Drawing a hard line between

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[31] See, for example, Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[32] Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport: Praeger, 2003). More recent examinations of the close ties between fascism and spectacle, and the link between aesthetic development during the ventennio with the drive for politicized spectacles, can be found in Jeffrey Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

entertainment and content that served an overtly political purpose, whether Mussolini's speeches or Ezra Pound's infamous transmissions from Rapallo, fails to account for the often subtle and sophisticated ways in which radio connected listeners, cultivated a sense of national unity, and supported fascism's aims while at the same time maintaining the appearance of simple entertainment.

This dissertation makes no claim to provide a complete record of the "Italian radio network" during this period. Indeed, to refer to EIAR as merely a "radio network" is to obscure the astonishing breadth of activities undertaken by the entity in the 1920s and 1930s and its centrality to the fascist regime's project of cultivating a sense of consensus, or unity, throughout the Italian nation. Instead, the chapters of this dissertation map the connections between specific transmissions and the regime's political projects in an effort to understand how Italian politics and culture were mediated by and through radio broadcasts. Because the term "propaganda" encompasses a wide range of content—from information to rumor, ideas to damning allegations—I avoid assigning such a label to any of the content considered in these chapters. Instead, I examine moments when technical innovation merged with artistic creation to promote a statist fantasy of national unity, which was concretized in the image of the radio receiver in the listener's home. This fantasy conceived of the radio listener as a receptive, captivated, and unwavering audience for both cultural education and political indoctrination, an image that was constantly undercut in communications between network officials.

Mussolini, an ex-journalist who believed firmly in the power of print media and public appearances, initially resisted the charms of the new medium. When Guglielmo Marconi joined the National Fascist Party (PNF) to lobby for the contract to construct the nation's first radio broadcasting service just after Mussolini's rise to power, the government instead granted concessions to French and German wireless corporations, the *Société Générale de la télégraphie sans fil* and Telefunken.[33] When these concessions fell through, Admiral Costanzo Ciano, former Under-Secretary of the Marines and Mussolini's new Minister for the Post and Telegraph, brokered a deal between Marconi's new telecommunications company, Radiofono, and SIRAC, a subsidiary of Western Electric. The deal allowed the private company Unione Radiofonica Italiana (URI) to build the first radio transmitter in Rome, from which they broadcast the first trial radio

[33] See Monteleone, *La radio italiana nel periodo fascista*, 16–24.

program on October 6, 1924. Initial experiments were successful enough to earn URI a six-year monopoly on national radio broadcasting beginning in December 1924. The network constructed new radio stations in Milan (1925) and Naples (1926), and continued to broadcast regular programs dominated by music, opera, and short comedies. URI maintained its monopoly until 1928, when it was replaced with a new private wireless corporation, EIAR. The same decree also formed a High Commission for Radio Inspection (Comitato Superiore di Vigilanza sulle Radiodiffusioni) which would be responsible for screening all radio plays and broadcast scripts to ensure that the material remained consistent with the policies, both cultural and political, of the fascist regime. By the end of its first year in operation, EIAR boasted transmitting stations in Rome, Milan, Naples, Bolzano, and Genoa. The network had developed an administrative structure that would remain largely the same throughout the next decade, and was transmitting more than seventeen hours of radio broadcasts each day.[34]

Three of the new entity's governing committee had experience working in Italian radio: president Enrico Marchesi (formerly an engineer and general director at FIAT), General Director Raoul Chiodelli (former engineer for SIRAC), and Vice President Luigi Solari (a former engineer at Radiofono). All three continued in the positions they had held since the 1924 creation of URI. Though the executive class stayed on, the transition from URI to EIAR heralded a closer relationship between the regime and radio, in the form of Arnaldo Mussolini, the dictator's brother, who would share the position of Vice President with Solari. In his inaugural address to EIAR subscribers, published on the front page of *Radiocorriere*, Arnaldo outlined the network's goals using language that tied the medium's cultural and aesthetic prospects to its ability to carry out the regime's political imperatives: "Radio has become part of everyday civilian life; it is a primary factor in our everyday activities and our spiritual growth… The mysterious fluid that runs through the ether and gives the sensation of the miraculous reaches every category of person… it reaches to the farthest countryside, bringing the deep echoes of the great cities to men who are far from these pulsing arteries of culture, life, and modernity… Today the radio must obey strict principles, and its prodigious development must be followed and carefully controlled…. It must instruct with amusement, but we must do so with vigilant attention so as not to fall into amateurism, into worldly insignificance, into the spirit of an old popular culture of dubious taste… It

[34] Cannistraro, "The Radio in Fascist Italy," 130.

follows you throughout the day; it speaks to businessmen and to the little Balillas; it gives you the vibrations and the latest news of art and politics; in short, it is an ultra-fast complement to all our daily efforts."[35] Like other writers on radio, including Ferrieri and the futurists, Arnaldo was driven to define what the new medium should and should not do. More importantly, however, the new Vice President's vision for radio emphasized its role as an omnipresent force for cultural education, particularly of the "masses" who existed outside the urban centers that were the source for most EIAR subscribers up to this point, a perspective that aligned the medium's artistic endeavors with the regime's political aims.

Studies of music and Italian fascism have tended to focus on the relationship between the regime and a single figure or group of canonic figures, generally composers or conductors like Puccini and Arturo Toscanini. In her groundbreaking book *Musica e musicisti nel ventennio fascista*, Fiamma Nicolodi revealed that almost all the principal composers of the time, from Franco Alfano to Riccardo Zandonai, corresponded with Mussolini, sending him scores and invitations to performances.[36] Roberto Illiano's edited volume *Italian Music during the Fascist Period* offered the earliest musicological studies of the European context and reception of Italian music during the fascist *ventennio*.[37] In his study of Luigi Dallapiccola, Ben Earle illuminates the composer's ambiguous history, complicity with the regime and sympathy for its nationalist policies, while also examining the development of the composer's unique brand of musical modernism during the 1930s and 1940s.[38] Such studies are vital to mapping

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[35] Arnaldo Mussolini, "Il saluto augurale," *Radiocorriere*, Jan. 5–11, 1930, 1. The "Balilla" mentioned by Mussolini referred to the recreational organization for young boys that took its name from Giovan Battista Perasso, the Genoese boy who, according to legend, initiated the revolt of 1746 against the occupying Habsburg forces by throwing a rock at an Austrian official. By 1930, the membership of the *balillas* and similar recreational groups defined by age, sex, and social class numbered in the millions. See Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15–18.

[36] Fiamma Nicolodi, *Musica e musicisti nel ventennio fascista* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1984).

[37] Roberto Illiano, ed., *Italian Music during the Fascist Period* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

[38] Ben Earle, *Luigi Dallapiccola and Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For other explorations of Italian opera during

the ways individual composers engaged with the fascist regime and how the regime in turn attempted to either officially or unofficially influence music production and performance.

This study seeks a different approach: rather than examining composers or conductors, I ask how the medium through which most Italians consumed music shaped both musical production and listening practices at a time when *how* people listened mattered as much as what they were listening to. In 1930, EIAR's Milan orchestra headlined the first Festival Internazionale di Musica, a contemporary music festival held adjacent to the Venice Biennale. The festival featured composers from across Europe, including Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky, Ernest Krenek, Darius Milhaud, and William Walton, as well as powerhouses of the Italian contemporary music scene such as Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Riccardo Pick Mangiagalli, Adriano Lualdi, Franco Alfano, Ildebrando Pizzetti, and Alfredo Casella, among others, as well as a concert of music by Handel, Vivaldi, and Corelli for those whose tastes ran more towards early music. For those who could not make it to Venice, the concerts were transmitted live on EIAR stations.[39] Through printed articles and on-air interviews with the festival's conductors and performers, EIAR strove to educate its listeners about what they were hearing, often betraying the network's own deep-seated anxiety that they would change the station when confronted with the less-than-mellifluous sounds of contemporary music.[40] In its range of artistic and national styles, the festival was a prime example of fascism's

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fascism, see Laura Basini, "Alfredo Casella and the Rhetoric of Colonialism," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 24, no. 2 (July 2012): 127–57; Michael P. Steinberg and Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, "Fascism and the Opera Unconscious," in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu,* ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 267–288.

[39] "Cronache Radiofoniche," *Radiocorriere*, Sept. 20–27, 1930, 41.

[40] Conductor and composer Giulio Cesare Gedda, who covered the festival for *Radiocorriere*, assured readers that, if they continued to listen to music "which could be described with no other word than interesting," they would be rewarded with a performance of "beautiful" music like Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. "Cronache Radiofoniche," *Radiocorriere*, Sept. 27–Oct. 4, 1930, 43; "Primo festival internazionale di musica," *Radiocorriere*, Aug. 16–23, 1930, 2; Giulio Cesare Gedda, "Commenti al Festival di Venezia," *Radiocorriere*, Aug. 8–15, 1930, 51;"Commenti al Festival di Venezia," *Radiocorriere*, Oct. 18–25, 1930, 49; and "Commenti al Festival di Venezia," *Radiocorriere*, Oct. 4–11, 1930, 5.

pluralist attitudes towards art and its ability to, as Marla Stone has argued, "rationalize contrary aesthetic languages—as well as opposing views of life."[41] Stone has shown how, by allowing a broad range of artistic styles to flourish, fascism both gained control of the means of cultural production and associated the regime with the cultural capital of contemporary aesthetic trends. The festival drew a significant crowd of listeners, despite the often-challenging quality of its musical offerings—a number multiplied many times, however, when we consider the number of listeners who tuned in to EIAR's transmissions from concert hall.

Radio, a medium with the ability to unite disparate people and places, developed simultaneously with political rhetoric under the fascist regime, and broadcasts of music and theater were seen by many politicians as tools for cultivating a collective consciousness. A key insight over the last three decades of scholarship on fascism has been the centrality of the regime's (ultimately futile) efforts to complete the project of Italian unification, which had begun during the Risorgimento. Public festivals and rallies centered on national symbols sought to unify the otherwise fragmented and amorphous "masses" into a single political body with a uniform history and mythology, and participation in these public rituals reinforced the perceived unity of that body. Emilio Gentile has shown how the performative nature of the regime's use of symbols led to a sacralization of politics, one in which the process of reenacting and celebrating fascism's foundational myths both created a sense of social cohesion and transformed what were political events into essentially religious rituals.[42] Gentile's insights built on scholarship by George Mosse on the use of national symbols and public rituals in Nazi Germany, which Mosse linked to an attempt to "nationalize the masses" by "transform[ing] political action into a drama."[43]

Italian fascism's public spectacles took on a variety of forms. Thus far, scholars have focused on the centrality of live presence and active participation to these spectacles. Mabel Berezin has argued that rituals like public reenactments of the March on Rome sought to erase the distinction between the public and private self that was central to liberalism, replacing

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41. Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 8.

[42] Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[43] Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (Ithaca and London, 1975), 150.

it instead with hyper-nationalist, public displays of political spectacle.[44] Victoria De Grazia has documented how leisure groups like the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro sought to bridge the gap between the regime and the "new" Italians, many of them workers in rural communities or "New Towns" constructed in the recently reclaimed Pontine Marshes.[45] The suggestion that radio, a blind medium, would be capable of either creating or reconstructing the kind of political spectacle so central to fascism's self-representation may seem farfetched. Certainly radio transmissions of concerts or political gatherings would not have the same sound quality, or visual appeal, as was experienced by those present at the event. Early radio could not reproduce either very high or very low frequencies, and the quality of microphones (on the production end) and of amplifier tubes and built-in speakers (on the receiving end) negatively affected the ultimate sound quality. This was particularly true for on-location broadcasts, in which elements such as echo and interference could be less tightly monitored and controlled than in the studio. Yet despite these limitations, for its proponents during fascism, radio promised to fulfill a crucial function: bringing into the orbit of broadcast experience those listeners who, by virtue of distance, were unable to witness the original spectacle.

Overview

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In the first, I trace the development of a specifically Italian radio aesthetic that established the medium as theatrical, even operatic. In the second main section, I examine the forces that sought to use Italy's newly-established radio sound for commercial and political gain, focusing on EIAR's efforts to expand into film and television during the final years of the fascist regime. In these latter chapters, I argue that both the 1940 film *Ecco la radio!* and EIAR's 1939 and 1940 experimental television broadcasting efforts were driven by the desire to define national culture as radiophonic.

In the first chapter, I explore the ways in which broadcasts of Italian

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[44] Mabel Berezin has shown how fascist groups used public ritual, including commemorations of the march on Rome, to inspire feelings of national belonging. See *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[45] De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*.

opera during the first decade of radio broadcasting in Italy intersected with Mussolini's policy of "going to the people." Antonio Gramsci noted that fascism was torn between American Fordism and a ruralism characterized by "the disparagement of cities."[46] Nowhere was this struggle between tradition and modernity more audible than in broadcasts of Italian opera, in which the operatic canon (associated during fascism with an earlier moment in which the nation maintained a measure of dominance over European culture) intersected with modern technology. By examining broadcasts from the studio, opera house, and outdoor theaters, I show that the pursuit of fidelity was characterized by attempts to make the opera house sound as much like the studio as possible, and that the technological and mechanical manipulations of engineers played a crucial role in blurring the boundaries between public and private and bringing the theater to the people via the radio.

The second chapter examines the Italian futurists' attempts to reimagine radio as an agent of change in the human body. Through analyses of archival material including never-performed works for the radio by Masnata, Marinetti, and Carmine Guarino, I reveal how the movement drew on contemporary studies of vibration and waves to conceive of a vibrant, tactile radio listening experience. The ethereal waves and the mechanical radio evoked analogies in popular media to the human brain and body, and the corresponding discussions resonated with the futurist project to transform both brain and body into technologies. The chapter analyzes the opera *Il Cuore di Wanda*, the first Italian opera composed for the radio, which mapped the process of transmission and reception directly onto the human body.

Chapter Three traces how variety shows and talent competitions in the 1930s reincorporated a visual element into radio broadcasting. Despite the political value of radio to the fascist regime, EIAR remained financially dependent on corporate sponsorship and radio advertising as well as listener subscriptions, and this chapter traces the tensions between the network's political and economic goals during what is largely considered the golden age in Italian broadcasting. It chronicles the development of a new kind of radiophonic celebrity through singing competitions, traveling shows, and eventually the development of EIAR's first and only full-length feature film, which represented the ultimate convergence of radio with

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[46] Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 280.

visual spectacle.

The final chapter investigates a series of experimental television broadcasts undertaken by EIAR in the years leading up to the Second World War. These experiments culminated in a public transmission to the National Fascist Party's bathing village located in the center of Rome's Circus Maximus. Although the regime took an ambivalent position in relation to commodity culture, EIAR's television experiments, undertaken with the government's financial and political support, reveal a much tighter linkage between culture, technology, commerce and politics than is typically understood to have occurred during fascism. The chapter explores both the official autarchical policies and the technological limitations that shaped the radio network's early experiments with television to show that producers' attitudes regarding medium specificity shaped decisions about programming and musical content.

As a whole, these chapters propose that radio broadcasts were not only political, but themselves generated political ideas and discourse. Take, for example, a 1935 program of Italian folk song, titled "Canti della terra italiana." The hour-long concert featured performances of songs from regions across Italy, from the northern Alps to the Neapolitan south to the islands of Sicily and Sardegna. "One imagines," claimed one reviewer, "a kind of vast radiophonic painting."[47] The broadcast's musical portrait painted Italy as a "synthesis," a unified stream of signification from which, according to the announcer, "a single song is born": the strains of the fascist anthem "Giovinezza," which concluded the concert. The broadcast was retransmitted by stations in Austria and Hungary; "thus, the voices of this land will truly fly from Italian antennas to those of friendly nations, both the voice of the past and that of its current miraculous rebirth." The trope of a native Italian vocality found its resolution in the military anthem that concluded the broadcast, with the result that listeners both at home and abroad could easily interpret "Giovinezza" as both a milestone and climax in the construction of a unified Italian identity. For both announcer and reviewer—producer and audience—the song and its broadcast were the ultimate symbol of a unified nation. The presentation offered "an organic and balanced unity, within which each song finds its place and binds itself harmoniously into those that precede and follow it."[48]

It goes without saying that such claims, of radio erasing class

[47] "I Canti della Terra Italiana, *Radiocorriere*, April 21–27, 1935, 18.
[48] "I Canti della Terra Italiana," 18.

distinctions and unifying Italy under a single national identity, were fictions. The medium's initial failure to establish a foothold among rural Italians, and its deference to both audience tastes and capitalist pressures throughout the 1930s, put paid to any real expectation that it would become the political instrument that German radio was for the Nazi party. Nevertheless, to dismiss entirely the hyperbolic rhetoric claiming Italians as a radiophonically unified people would be to collapse into the rigid oppositions with which this introduction began, and to reinforce the vision of the pre-Republic nation as fragmented, traditional, and anti-modern. In what follows I take a different path, one that seeks to understand how rhetoric about radiophonic unification conjured up new ideas about the masses, reframing them as a listening audience ready to capture the signal. That this reframing occurred not at the level of political discourse but through the development and circulation of cultural broadcasts meant that there was freedom for dissent, for failure, for experimentation, and for listeners, producers, artists and even the radio itself to have a voice in the process.

Chapter 1: Tosca and the Nightingale

Ten days before Mussolini declared war on Britain and France, EIAR released its first feature-length film. Aptly titled *Ecco la radio!*, the film offered a "day-in-the-life" of the radio, beginning with the morning constitutionals of a sweaty, rotund man and his two children, and ending in a rollicking late-night dance set by the popular Trio Lescano. Somewhere around the middle of the hour-long film—early evening in the radio's day-long saga—is a scene showing a rural family gathered together to listen to an evening opera broadcast. An offscreen narrator introduces the scene with the following text: "Some evenings, you leave home to go to the theater; but often, when the radio transmits an opera or a comedy, the theater comes to you."[1] The image presents an idealized radio audience: a family gathered together in their country home, listening to the radio playing a studio performance of Gaetano Donizetti's *Poliuto*. Each member of the riveted family gazes directly at the machine, watching it as if they can see through its wires directly to the opera stage. A young boy whittles in the background, the scraping of his knife against the wood loud enough that it earns a reprimand from his grandfather and a cuff from his father. Even the family dog sits quietly, tail wagging, as music resonates in the humble home.

Reality would not have measured up to the demographics represented in the film. Until the early 1930s, the vast majority of EIAR subscribers were members of the urban upper-middle class. Despite the fascist regime's push starting in 1930 to provide low-cost radio receivers to rural areas of the nation, as late as 1940 about half of all villages in Italy remained without any access to radio communications.[2] Nevertheless, the perception of radio as a technology capable of uniting urban and rural spaces remained central to political discourse surrounding the medium. Mauro Janni, the cultural critic for *Il Popolo d'Italia*, wrote in 1933 that placing "a radio in every house" would provide peasants in rural areas with crucial, government-provided news and culture.[3] Some of the transmitted

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[1] "La sera, ci si muove a casa per andare al teatro; ma spesso, quando la radio trasmette l'opera o una commedia, il teatro viene a casa vostra." *Ecco la radio!* Directed by Giacomo Gentilomo. EIAR, 1940.

[2] The imbalance between urban and rural listeners persisted in spite of projects like Ente Radio Rurale in 1933, which distributed radio sets to rural schools. "Orientamenti Radiorurali," *Radiocorriere,* June 11–18, 1933, 14.

[3] Mauro Janni, "Radiorurale e radiobalilla," *Il Popolo d'Italia*, May 2, 1937.

content included explicitly political propaganda and dialect plays composed especially for rural listeners, although by 1936 half of the 40,000 listening hours transmitted were still devoted to music of various kinds, with a significant emphasis on Italian opera and symphonic music.[4]

This chapter examines the intersecting aesthetic, commercial, and political interests at work in producing and disseminating opera over the radio during the first decade of Italian broadcasting. In the years following the nation's inaugural broadcast in 1924, radio producers and advertisers presented the medium as capable of blurring the line between public and private spaces, transporting the listener from home into a public venue. Early radio's effectiveness as a tool for both entertainment and propaganda was directly linked to its ability to transmit a sound object simultaneously from one place to another with the appearance of fidelity, an illusion that was the direct result of efforts to render the medium inaudible and the process of human and mechanical labor invisible. While broadcasts of opera made this an especially difficult feat for early producers, these broadcasts were also uniquely rewarding on a political level due to their popularity with listeners and connection to a uniquely Italian musical tradition.

At a time when distance was the primary barrier to the fascist regime's policies of *bonifica* (the regime's preferred term for its projects of agricultural and human reclamation) and "going to the people," radio broadcasts of Italian opera became tools for fostering a national identity, one that united modern technologies with Italian operatic tradition. Opera broadcasts were the most popular among those produced by EIAR, which by 1940 reached well over a million listeners. I begin this chapter with an examination of the first operas broadcast from the radio studio and the opera house. Since broadcasts were not regularly recorded until decades later, I rely on archival materials, including letters from listeners, weekly publications, and government documents, to uncover and reconstruct the herculean efforts undertaken by early radio producers to simulate the presence and liveness of the opera house. The second section investigates radio broadcasts of the Carro di Tespi Lirico, a traveling opera troupe created by the fascist regime to bring Italian culture to rural areas. By untangling the intersecting networks of dissemination traced by theatrical cars and radio signals, I show that broadcasts of the Carro di Tespi Lirico served a parallel function to the theatrical cars, collapsing distance and transporting urban listeners from "unhealthy" cities to "healthful" rural

[4] *Radiocorriere,* January 3–9, 1937, 5.

towns constructed by the fascist regime.

The Nightingale Sings

When Mussolini seized power in October 1922, Italy did not possess even one radio transmitter, placing it behind other Western countries; by the time the nation entered the Second World War in June 1940, it boasted an extensive network that reached even the most isolated listeners.[5] As Italian broadcasting developed in the 1930s, artists, intellectuals, radio producers, and government officials debated the medium's social and public potential—and did so in terms that echoed contemporaneous discussions in Britain and America.[6] In Italy, though, these discussions were dominated by the question of how best to harness radio's power to unite distant people and to cultivate a distinct national sound. The perceived lack of a unified national identity, which had caused severe political anxiety among Italian intellectuals during the nineteenth century, was seen during fascism as a barrier to modernization and as a weakness that could make Italy vulnerable to foreign control. Initially skeptical of radio's potential as a political tool, the regime later embraced it as one element of its plan to unify the nation, the first step in constructing its supranational empire. This tight linkage between political rhetoric and broadcasting parallels the situation of post-Weimar German radio, where in 1932 new reforms emphasized the "duty" of German radio to "cultivate the idea of the Reich."[7]

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[5] See Cannistraro, "The Radio in Fascist Italy."

[6] For studies of British broadcasting during the period, see Jennifer Doctor, *The BBC and Ultra-Modern Music, 1922–1936: Shaping a Nation's Tastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Christina Baade, "Radio Symphonies: The BBC, Everyday Listening and the Popular Classics Debate during the People's War," in *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don't Always Notice*, ed. Marta García Quiñones, Anahid Kassabian, and Elena Boschi (London: Routledge, 2016), 49–74. On radio in America, see Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920–1934* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); Susan J. Douglas, *Listening in: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); and Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013).

[7] Kate Lacey, *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere 1923–1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 51. See also Brian

Then again, Italian radio differed from National Socialist radio both in its institutional construction—after the 1932 reforms German radio was entirely centralized, while Italian radio was funded both by government subsidies and commercial revenue—and in its approach to programming. Mussolini's regime fostered an "aesthetic pluralism," one that emphasized propagandistic and nationalistic value while offering the illusion of artistic freedom.[8] EIAR followed this policy by transmitting a variety of lectures, popular music, and opera broadcasts, all designed simultaneously to appeal to listeners and to cultivate and reinforce their sense of a unified national culture.

The radio's capacity to create unity depended on merging distant spaces by faithfully reconstructing the sounds of the original source, be it studio or theater, in the listener's home—what would in the 1930s come to be called *fidelity*.[9] While the term could be and was historically applied to many different sound-reproducing technologies, including the telephone and the phonograph, in the case of radio the metaphor of transposition implied by fidelity (wherein the sound of the original is transported from one space to another) was coupled with a sense of "immediacy," in which the original occurred simultaneously with the reconstruction. Before examining the implications of this perceived immediacy in fascist Italy, it may be helpful to consider Theodor Adorno's more theoretical approach to the topic, which he developed during his tenure at the Princeton Radio Project from 1938 to 1941. While Adorno's critique emerged in an American context, his outspoken anxiety about radio's totalitarian potential raises important questions regarding the tension between the power of the broadcasted voice—which he determined was produced by the medium itself—and the listener's ability to turn the dial and thereby resist autocratic authority. Adorno linked radio's sense of immediacy with its capacity to create the immersive experience he had already identified in the context of opera as "phantasmagoria."[10] As an example, he shared the story of a

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Currid, *A National Acoustics: Music and Mass Publicity in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

[8] Marla Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 61.

[9] In media studies, the term "fidelity" describes the erasure of audible remnants of the medium and the subsequent rendering of what Fredric Jameson called a "vanishing mediator": Jameson, "The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber," *New German Critique* 1 (1973): 52–89.

[10] In his book *Versuch über Wagner* (*In Search of Wagner*), Adorno described a

nightingale singing in the garden of a country home and recorded by a microphone placed next to the tree. The tenants of the home, listening to both the broadcast and the live birdsong, heard the recorded nightingale before hearing the live one, a difference Adorno attributed to the different velocities of radio and sound waves. In addition, the electrification of the natural phenomenon—in this case, birdsong—made the "real" song seem less present to the gathered listeners, transforming the real nightingale into a mere "echo of the broadcast one."[11]

But unlike Wagnerian phantasmagoria, whose effects would seem predicated on the public architecture of the opera house, the power of the nightingale's song depended on its novel reconfiguration of domestic space. "The 'authority' of radio increases the more it reaches the listener in his privacy," Adorno wrote:

> The isolated listener… feels overwhelmed by the might of the personal voice of an anonymous organization… The more strongly this voice is coming from the personal sphere of the listener and the more it appears to stream from the cells of his intimate life, the more he has the impression as if his own cupboard, his own phonograph, his own bedroom were speaking to him as a personal friend or enemy… The listener who believes that the commentator shouting through his loudspeaker is a dictator, is wrong. But the fact that he sounds like a dictator expresses an imposition of publicity upon privacy which gives every reason to fear dictators. It makes the radio voice the bearer of the potentialities, acoustic as well as social, of dictatorship.[12]

In other words, Adorno viewed the radio as at once phantasmagorical and domestic, present and absent, private and public. In his account, even non-political voices broadcast over the radio bore a potential for dictatorship because of their ability to intrude unidirectionally into the private sphere

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dialectical process whereby the commodity effaced any traces of the means of production in order to create a "total" illusion, so that the "product present[ed] itself as self-producing." *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2005), 74.

[11] Theodor Adorno and Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 74.

[12] Adorno and Hullot-Kentor, *Current of Music*, 376.

and because of the authority inherent in the acousmatic voice: disembodied, but emanating from the listener's own cupboards and bedroom.

In what follows, I explore the possibility that the ineffable quality that led Adorno to call radio a "piece of furniture in the private room" endowed broadcast music—specifically, Italian opera—with a unique power to disseminate national identity during the first decades of the fascist regime. In so doing, I ask what can be gained by studying quotidian cultural experiences that pale in comparison to the theatrical spectacles and public gatherings typically associated with fascism.[13] Extravagant performances like the 1934 production *18BL*, which featured two thousand actors, fifty trucks, eight bulldozers, four field- and machine-gun batteries, ten field radio stations, and six photoelectric brigades, have remained at the forefront of scholarship seeking to understand how a theater of and for the masses manifested during the 1920s and 1930s in Italy.[14] But even beyond the realm of modernist pyrotechnics, managing workers' access to leisure and entertainment was central to the regime's efforts to appeal to workers and transform them into New Italians. Fascist policy during these decades was directed toward manufacturing consent among a working population, in order to bolster the economy of a nation bitterly divided by class, regional, and political differences.[15] Fascism's internal conflict was no secret—Antonio Gramsci identified it as the burden of a party whose base was primarily composed of the urban petty bourgeoisie and a newly formed rural bourgeoisie.[16] While the regime may have presented itself as the unified leader of a newly modern, industrialized nation, the party struggled

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[13] See Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[14] Jeffrey Thompson Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

[15] Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[16] Gramsci noted that fascism was torn between American Fordism's drive to industrialize and a ruralism characterized by "the disparagement of cities typical of the Enlightenment, exaltation of the artisan and of idyllic patriarchalism, reference to craft rights and a struggle against industrial liberty." He associated this ruralism with a conservative preference for "European culture with all its train of parasites," one that nevertheless encountered opposition among party members. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 280.

to align itself between an intellectual class largely composed of urban elites and a rural population whose needs and concerns were very different from those of the urban working class. Italians' complex relationship with the state manifested in heterogeneous and conflicting representations of national identity on the cinema screen, in theaters, and over the radio.[17] The fascist desire to create a unified national identity informed EIAR's efforts to broadcast Italian opera. In the earliest decades of the regime, radio served as the government's primary means for disseminating propaganda and creating a modern Italian folklore, the heterogeneous scraps of past and present cultural practices and worldviews that Gramsci dubbed "common sense."[18] Opera broadcasts offered a particularly potent set of associations with Italian national heritage, presenting a canon of works that harkened back to an era of Italian primacy with the sheen of modern technologies. The modern folklore at the heart of these broadcasts reflected producers' and the regime's struggles between tradition and modernity in the construction and dissemination of *italianità*.

Seeing Opera, Hearing Opera

At the heart of Adorno's anecdote about the voice of the nightingale was the concern that radio could produce a hyperreal simulation of experience that would subsequently empty reality of meaning and leave only the shell of the copy. Such a close resemblance between original and copy was an elusive ideal for opera broadcasts of the late 1920s. But even if broadcasts failed to measure up to the standards of fidelity set by Adorno's nightingale, the possibility of a broadcast standing in for reality was a desirable outcome for both EIAR and the fascist regime, and a highly politicized one. As a private broadcasting company with an exclusive concession from the fascist regime, funded by both advertising revenue and by subscription fees paid to the Ministry of Post, EIAR was simultaneously a government entity and a

[17] Marcia Landy's analyses of Italian films of the 1920s and 1930s have provided insight into the fragmented, heterogeneous nature of consensus and the ways in which the masses were themselves implicated in the workings of Italian fascism. See Landy, *Cinema and Counter-History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); and *The Folklore of Consensus: Theatricality in the Italian Cinema, 1930–1943* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

[18] See "Philosophy, Common Sense, Language and Folklore," in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 323–63; and Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus*, xiii.

commercial enterprise. In addition to their commercial value, broadcasts of operas by Italian composers offered unique potential to boost national pride and garner political support for the regime. From 1925 to 1926, EIAR's predecessor, the Unione Radiofonica Italiana (URI) transmitted 35 broadcasts of 11 full operas. By the end of the decade, that number had jumped to nearly 1300 broadcasts of 457 operas and operettas taking place on all EIAR stations.[19] The value of these broadcasts for building consensus and constructing national identity lay squarely in their ability to simulate, as faithfully as possible, the experience of going to the opera—paradoxically, a process made more difficult by the network's push to broadcast directly from the opera house.

Opera broadcasts, even more than other musical transmissions, called attention to the radio's stubborn presence. The earliest live broadcasts of opera emanated from the studio, where the first problem to resolve was how to transform the audiovisual experience of opera into a purely sonic event. New "auditoriums" in Rome, Milan, Naples, and Turin served as the setting for both popular song concerts and full opera productions.[20] Photos documenting these productions show the orchestra and singers facing the conductor, with microphones stationed in the center of the stage, and audience members looking on from the sidelines. Sounds recorded during the performance would undergo modulation (whereby the sound waves were attached to carrier waves) and amplification before transmission over the radio antenna. Like other studio concerts—for example, recitals—these opera performances involved no costumes, staging, or sets that could interfere with the production of a clean recording. Still, producers feared that a radio broadcast could never faithfully reconstruct the experience of being in the opera house. They sought to compensate for the cognitive dissonance produced by the lack of image by printing pictures and drawings of the operatic sets next to summaries of the opera's plot and historical context in *Radiocorriere*. There is little evidence that these measures successfully replaced the act of *seeing* opera. Such images were

[19] Numbers drawn from EIAR listings printed in *Radiocorriere* for the seasons 1925–26 and 1930–31.

[20] Within the first ten years of broadcasting, EIAR opened stations in nine Italian cities. Following the initial broadcast from Roma I on October 6, 1924, new stations opened in Milan (1925), Naples (1926), Bolzano (1928), Genoa (1928), Turin (1929), Palermo (1931), Trieste (1931), Bari (1932), and Florence (1932). See Gino Castelnuovo, "La storia degli impianti della radio italiana," *Radiocorriere*, October 2–8, 1949, 16.

often (though not always) published the week after the actual broadcast.[21] Even when listeners received images ahead of the broadcast, without a detailed libretto, it was unlikely they would attach a particular image to its counterpart in the operatic narrative.

Despite the missing pictures, subscribers kept listening to and calling for more and better broadcasts of opera. In part, the popularity of opera on the radio can be attributed to the fact that, prior to the invention of long-playing records, radio was the only medium capable of bringing a complete, uninterrupted opera into the home. While the increased availability of recordings made it possible to listen to popular songs and individual arias, records couldn't take the place of a live performance due to their inability to fit an entire symphony, let alone a full opera, onto a single disc. Recordings required the listener to interrupt the flow of the music to turn over or replace a record, and for many critics this alone reflected an intractable rupture in the musical continuum, one that made for a substantial difference between the listener's experience of a recorded performance and of a live performance. Opera on the radio, by contrast, could be offered in its entirety with the only breaks occurring between acts, making it an incomplete, but nevertheless inviting, replacement for the "real thing."

As early as 1926, URI focused its resources on broadcasting directly from the opera house, beginning with broadcasts from Rome's Teatro Eliseo and Teatro Adriano on 1RO, followed by Rome's Teatro Costanzi, Milan's Teatro Lirico, and Naples' Teatro San Carlo the following year.[22] Listeners who wanted to hear full operas broadcast from the major Italian opera houses flooded *Radiocorriere* with letters like this one: "In response to the competition launched by this paper, while I declare that the current program is quite good, I say I prefer those evenings in which an operetta is given directly from the Lyric, and it would be my desire to hear operas and

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[21] This delay could have been due to the fact that individual stations did not always know which opera they would broadcast two weeks in advance—thus the common sight of listings promising a "broadcast from the theater" without specific information as to which opera, from which theater, would be transmitted. Even when the operas and theaters were named ahead of their broadcast, listings would regularly omit details about the specific conductors or singers slated to perform. See, for example, G. M. Ciampelli, "'I Dispettosi Amanti' di A. Parelli alla Stazione di Milano,'" *Radiorario*, May 16–23, 1926, 9.

[22] "La trasmissione dai teatri," *Radiorario* October 24–31, 1926, 2; "Le Trasmissioni dal R. Teatro San Carlo di Napoli," *Radiocorriere*, Feb. 13–20, 1927, 1.

dramas, not in selections, but in full and if possible transmitted directly from the theater."[23] But the setting most desired by producers and requested by listeners—the Teatro alla Scala—eluded the network's grasp for another two years, due to conflicts between producers and theater management.[24] EIAR officials blamed management's unwillingness to broadcast from La Scala on false assumptions regarding potential economic and artistic damage to the work—assumptions that the network argued had "already been debunked" by the results of "similar transmissions in Italy and abroad."[25] Between 1926 and 1928, EIAR maintained a concerted effort to gain entrance to La Scala, driven by listeners who claimed that such broadcasts would be like "having touched the heavens with a finger"—an expression akin to "walking on clouds."[26] In December 1928, EIAR finally breached La Scala's venerated walls with a broadcast of Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*. Reviews of the broadcast lauded the "perfect transmission" of the sound and offered "heartfelt congratulations for the excellent broadcast and the magnificent and perfect effects it obtained."[27] But a closer examination of the broadcast's technical elements reveal the challenges the opera house posed for early radio engineers and the efforts they made to transform it into a studio.

EIAR attributed the delay in broadcasting from La Scala in part to the difficulty of wiring the theater for transmission. The standards for fidelity had already been set by operas broadcast from the studio, during which interruptions, echo, reverberation, volume, and balance could be carefully controlled. Broadcasts from opera houses were therefore characterized by a tension between producers' desire to eliminate the

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[23] Ettore Sacchi, "Le Risposte degli Abbonati al Nostro Radioreferendum," *Radiorario*, April 2, 1927, 9.

[24] "La 'Tosca' di Puccini dalla Scala," *Radiorario,* Dec. 23–30, 1928: 3. Similar concerns delayed broadcasts from the Metropolitan Opera in New York until 1931, more than a decade after the first American opera broadcast from Chicago in 1919. On the history of opera broadcasting in the United States, see Timothy D. Taylor, "The Role of Opera in the Rise of Radio in the United States," in *Music and the Broadcast Experience: Performance, Production, and Audiences*, ed. Christina Baade and James A. Deaville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 69–87.

[25] "Le trasmissioni dai teatri," *Radiorario*, Dec. 5–12, 1926, 9.

[26] "Le Risposte degli Abbonati al Nostro Radioreferendum," *Radiorario,* June 4, 1927, 46.

[27] Alberto C. Blanche, "La 'Tosca' di Puccini dalla Scala," *Radiorario,* Dec. 23–30, 1928, 3.

sounds of audible audience reactions, rustling costumes, choreography, and set changes—in short, all extramusical signifiers of a live performance—and the need to convince listeners that the broadcast was a faithful replacement for being present in the theater. Since possibilities for manipulating the signal once it reached the studio were limited, it was imperative to prepare the theater in such a way as to compensate for its lively acoustic ambience. Broadcasting directly from the theater required a double set of portable amplifiers, as opposed to the single amplifier used in the studio. Sounds were run first through an amplifier placed very close to the microphone to avoid amplifying the inevitable and numerous "parasitic" intrusions the signal would encounter as it moved along the wires that connected theater and studio. The signal would go through a second amplification and modulation in the studio before transmission over the antennae. Yet not only the space but the very nature of opera itself seemed to resist a clean transmission. The unanticipated movements of singers across the stage meant they could walk away from the microphone at a crucial high point. Enthusiastic applause could overwhelm the microphones and drown out the sounds of the music. Measured against the "perfection" of sounds recorded in the studio, even Italy's most exalted opera house fell alarmingly short.

Further delays resulted from disagreements with the La Scala management over the placement of the amplifier, as well as proposed modifications to staging practices (for example, limiting the movements of singers in order to ensure a clean recording devoid of the sounds of footsteps and rustling of costumes). Engineers apologized for the fact that the "structure of theater performance… means that radio, inevitably, cannot reach the perfect transmission quality produced with a transmission from an acoustic environment designed to avoid echoes, reflections of sounds, etc."[28] Foremost among the challenges was controlling echoes, reverberation, and interference (whereby the encounter of waves with their own reflections would produce areas where sound was reinforced and others where sound was deadened). While in the studio these could be controlled with the special placement of dampening curtains, in the opera house such measures were dependent on theater management, who largely resisted engineers' attempts to manipulate the acoustics of the hall. This left engineers with only one tool to produce a studio-like sound from the theater: the microphone. During preparations for the La Scala broadcast,

[28] "La trasmissione dai teatri," *Radiorario,* October 24–31, 1926, 4.

multiple attempts to place four microphones at strategic points in the theater "famous for their acoustics among Milanese operagoers" were halted by theater management on the grounds that they would block patrons' sightlines; after weeks of experimentation and disagreement, engineers settled for placing the microphones in the orchestra and at rigidly defined points onstage. Ten days later, the chief engineer for the *Tosca* broadcast published a passionate defense of his team recounting the difficulty of broadcasting from the theater but affirming that the enthusiasm the broadcast sparked in Italy and abroad made up for its defects.[29]

Not everyone in the theatrical community was pleased by the success of EIAR's theater broadcasts. A 1932 article in Milan's *Corriere della Sera* attributed falling ticket sales at La Scala to the theft of its audiences by broadcasts from the theater, arguing that audiences who could pay a single network subscription fee to hear unlimited opera on the radio would be less likely to pay much more extravagant prices to attend a live performance.[30] The following week, EIAR printed multiple responses to the article in *Radiocorriere*, including several pages by engineer G. Sommi Picenardi, who argued: "The radio doesn't drive people away from the theater, but rather brings them back and prepares them for a more complete and effective understanding of musical and scenic beauty… Instead of imagining the young David of radio intending to bring down the Goliath of the theater, I think it is more correct to say that now the old question of the 'people's theater' [teatro del popolo] is nearly accomplished. All the opera houses, indiscriminately, even the most aristocratic… 'go' as the saying goes, 'to the people.'"[31] Picenardi framed the process of educating the (supposedly ignorant) masses via the radio as the first step in gaining new audiences for the theater, a solution to the supposed "crisis" that the original *Corriere della Sera* article attributed to the rise of the new medium. He argued that the radiophonic audience would be more likely to make an effort to attend a live performance after listening to opera at home; far from damaging opera's standing in the modern world, radio could save it.

The editorial's repeated reference to Mussolini's famed edict to "andare verso il popolo" aligned this process with the fascist regime's

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[29] See Blanche, "La 'Tosca' di Puccini dalla Scala," 3.

[30] "Quanto spendono i milanesi per gli spettacoli," *Corriere della sera,* Feb. 17, 1932, 6.

[31] G. Sommi Picenardi, "La radio e il teatro lirico," *Radiorario*, Feb. 27– March 4, 1932, 5.

cultural policy. "Going to the people" was a central element of the regime's project to shape the "character, mentality, habits, and customs of the Italian people" through participation in cultural activities, among them listening to opera. Drawn from a 1931 speech by Mussolini in Naples, in which the fascist leader urged his party "to go to the people… if there are detractors that seek to interrupt this regime's direct communion with the people… we, in the supreme interest of the nation, will break them," the decree initially referred to a strategy of political action to support a regime threatened by the reports of renewed communist activity, increased Catholic activism, and nation-wide financial depression.[32] The decree was not limited to explicit governmental policy but also understood as a call to arms directed at Italy's cultural producers, many of whom had already been engaged for years in a politically motivated attempt to reach a larger public. It marked a turn in fascist policy toward mass organizing and led to increased governmental support for cultural activities directed at workers, primarily through events hosted by the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, which provided low-cost cinema tickets, social gatherings, lectures, and other cultural events for its members.[33] The radio, which by its very nature blurred the lines between public and private, seemed particularly well suited to the task.

By directing substantial funds toward broadcasting from theaters, EIAR had effectively anticipated the regime's "andare al popolo" policy in their promotion of theatrical broadcasts. Thus the advertisement for a series of broadcasts from the 1927 summer season of the Teatro Carcano in Milan claimed to "stage performances artistically in all respects for the public who do not have the ability to go to La Scala and who, nevertheless, have the sacred right to tap the spiritual Art to lift their spirits in noble enjoyment… Fascism must consider the people in this sense."[34] At the time, La Scala remained inaccessible to the network—the *Tosca* broadcast would not take place until the following year—but EIAR promoted the summer season as a means of bringing opera to a new public and as a way to rescue singers from the harsh economic circumstances caused by the theatrical

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[32] Benito Mussolini, "Al popolo napoletano," in *Opera omnia* vol. 25, ed. Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1958), 48.

[33] For an in-depth study on cultural projects performed by the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro in response to the regime's decree, see De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*, 14.

[34] A. Giustiniani, "Le trasmissioni dal Teatro Carcano," *Radiorario,* March 26, 1927, 1.

crisis.[35] The season featured the voices of popular singers including Toti dal Monte, Alessandro Bonci, Nazareno De Angelis, Carlo Galeri, and Aureliano Pertile performing a series of operas drawn directly from the Italian canon—Gaetano Donizetti's *La favorita* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*; Puccini's *La bohème* and *La fanciulla del West*; Gioachino Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*; and Giuseppe Verdi's *Attila*, *Un ballo in maschera,* and *La traviata*. Performances offered low-cost tickets ostensibly directed at a public who, for lack of funds, would have been unable to secure seats at one of the major opera houses during the regular season but who would nevertheless benefit from "noble enjoyment" of listening to opera. Radio broadcasts of the operas would further expand the reach of this project of cultural education, reaching both absent and distant listeners.

The pursuit of fidelity that so preoccupied producers depended on the construction of a fictional original, the "opera house" that sounded like a studio, through the technological and mechanical manipulations of EIAR engineers. The subsequent erasure of these processes played a crucial role in blurring the boundaries between public and private, an effort central to the political project of bringing theater to the people. But a "faithful" transmission didn't just re-create the sounds of a fictional space; it did so simultaneously with the original, producing a signal so fast that its reception coincided with its production. The value of the broadcast lay in its ability to collapse space and convince listeners—particularly those far from urban centers—that they were as good as "present" at the main event. In an unsigned letter addressed to the tenor Aristodemo Giorgini dated January 6, 1926, the author described the experience of tuning into the Milan station from Naples:

> Yesterday we had an exceptional evening with the Radio, and fortunately I stopped on the Milan Station, which could be heard marvelously… We listened to the whole piece over the speaker without the slightest fading, and the signal was so strong that my father, though he was already in bed and far from the mechanism, heard your voice magnificently… You cannot believe how your voice was reproduced so faithfully that it seemed as though you were there among us, and I assure you that one could not ask for more.[36]

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[35] Giustiniani, "Le trasmissioni del Teatro Carcano," 1.

[36] "Lettere di ascoltatori," *Radiorario*, March 14–21, 1926, 5.

The simile used by the author—which equated listening to the broadcast to having the singer present in the room—drew on familiar language to describe fidelity. The sound of the singer's voice over the radio, it suggested, was equal to the sound of the voice in the studio; the copy was as good as the original. In fact, the author described a signal so powerful that it extended even beyond the reach of the speaker. Instead of fading away, the signal continued until it reached the ears of an even more distant listener—the writer's father, lying in bed. Although the description highlighted the fidelity of the sound reproduction, the medium was far from vanishing. Instead, the copy took on the penetrative and amplifying qualities of a radio signal. The strength of the singer's voice recalls Adorno's description of the authoritarian voice of the radio announcer, whose tones penetrated the private space of the listener and so imposed the public spectrum on the private. Furthermore, the letter directly connected the power of the singer's voice to the strength of the signal, which so far exceeded their expectations that it seemed capable almost of manifesting the singer's body in the listener's home.

In letters to EIAR, listeners often revealed more interest in the quality of the radio signal than in the content of the broadcast, sometimes associating a high-quality signal with strong nationalist values. One letter, signed by engineer Giuseppe Visconti of Turin and dated November 8, 1925, complimented a musical broadcast "as clear as ever from other stations, even the weakest words, with a simply marvelous piano and violin and wonderful singing voice. I can, therefore, declare that the Milan Station has, for me, the best modulation I have been able to receive thus far, and I say this not for the sake of flattery but from a sense of Italian pride [*italianità*]."[37] Another letter signed by Mario de Andreis from Marseilles and dated just eleven days later expressed a similar sentiment: "I have the pleasure of informing you that for several evenings now I have been receiving broadcasts from the Milan station which I find excellent in terms of purity, strength, etc. I will not hide from you that it is with the lively satisfaction of an Italian that I tune into the airwaves originating from a new station of my homeland."[38] Clarity, purity, and strength were all terms repeatedly used to describe radio signals in both listener letters and publications by engineers. Both letters used the terms to depict a quality of

[37] "Lettere di ascoltatori," *Radiorario*, Feb. 21–28, 1926, 3.
[38] "Lettere di ascoltatori," *Radiorario*, March 14–21, 1926, 7.

sound that also represented a triumph on a national scale. The success of the broadcast was defined by the clarity of its signal, and that success had broad-reaching implications.

Broadcasting *Italianità*

The sense of collective participation central to the regime's policy of "going to the people" depended on a series of technological manipulations geared toward collapsing the distance between urban and rural and blurring the boundary between the public and private spheres, allowing listeners to experience the sound of a broadcast as both present and immediate. Perhaps the most concrete manifestation of bringing the theater to the people can be found in the Carro di Tespi Lirico, a traveling opera troupe charged with performing opera in rural cities throughout Italy. The regime viewed both the Carro di Tespi and the radio as forces capable of unifying rural and urban spaces and constructing a collective national identity; Achille Starace, the director of the PNF and one of the strongest proponents of the Carro di Tespi Lirico, believed radio capable of "introducing the sounds and rhythms of industrial society into the rural world, and of assuring continuous contact between the state and the outlying rural areas."[39] Performances were subsequently broadcast from rural piazzas back to radio audiences in a process that claimed to reverse the movement of the theatrical cars. These broadcasts served the function of witnesses, providing evidence of the regime's ongoing work of *bonifica*.

Performances by the Carro di Tespi were just one of several elements of a comprehensive project of social engineering that Mussolini hoped would "fascistize the Nation, until Italian and fascist, almost like Italian and Catholic, are one and the same thing."[40] The term *bonifica,* or reclamation, initially described the process undertaken to convert swampland into arable soil and build New Towns along the Agro Pontino and in Sicily and Sardegna. But agricultural cultivation was only the most concrete instantiation of the fascist desire to reclaim and purify Italian land and culture. The metaphor of "pulling up the bad weeds and cleaning the soil," used initially to describe agricultural reclamation, applied to both people

[39] De Grazia, *Culture of Consent*, 155.
[40] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (University of California Press, 2001), 19.

and culture—perhaps the best-known and one of the most extreme manifestations being the regime's 1938 anti-Jewish laws. Removal was only one part of this process—another central element involved transferring people into the newly formed *bonifica* sites. Although the fascist party, having started as a movement in Milan, had distinctly urban roots, Mussolini and his army of city planners had come to view the city as a pathological environment. By moving people out of the city and into the (now presumably healthful) countryside, the regime sought to bring about real changes to both the Italian landscape and people.[41] Broadcasts of the Carro di Tespi's performances offered a means by which listeners could experience a mediated version of the rural experience, all without leaving the comfort of their homes. More importantly, the broadcasts' capacity to stand in for live performances and avail urban listeners of the "benefits" offered by the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro furthered the regime's project of constructing a unified Italian national identity born of tradition and produced through modern technologies.[42]

The Carro di Tespi Lirico began touring from Rome and Milan to La Spezia, Ravenna, and Pisa during the summer of 1931. In addition to democratizing access to the theater, the arena performances became venues for explicit political propaganda. Local officials would regularly open performances with grandstanding speeches on the benefits of fascism and an orchestral rendition of *Giovinezza*, the regime's musical anthem. But while these pre-show events might cause us to draw an artificial line between the political framing and the actual opera performance, such a

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[41] Multiple scholars have identified the close link between the regime's policy of *bonifica* and its outspoken desire to create a fascist "New Man." The regime's extensive attempts to rationalize, plan, and legislate both the political and physical bodies of its citizens are the subject of David G. Horn's *Social Bodies: Science, Reproduction, and Italian Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). For more on anti-urbanism and discourse promoting the countryside as a healthful alternative to city life, see Danilo Breschi, *Mussolini e la città: il fascismo tra antiurbanesimo e modernità* (Milan: Luni editrice, 2018).

[42] The traveling opera troupe was financed by the OND as an addition to the organization's troupe of traveling Thespian cars, established in 1929 and inspired by Gioacchino Forzano, the artistic director of La Scala and collaborator with Mussolini on various theatrical and literary projects. For maps outlining the movements of both the Carro di Tespi and the Carro di Tespi Lirico, see Patricia Gaborik, "Lo spettacolo del fascismo," in *Atlante della letteratura Italiana*, ed. Sergio Luzzatto and Gabriele Pedulla (Turin: Einaudi, 2012), 589–613.

division risks obscuring the political messages inherent to every aspect of the performance, including the theatrical cars themselves.[43] During the spring and summer months, the traveling theatrical cars employed over a thousand actors and opera singers, orchestra musicians, and stage and sound technicians, as well as drivers for the buses and trucks that carried the equipment for an 890-square-meter theater that could seat up to 6,000 audience members.[44] Three hundred hired hands could set up the traveling theater, a "Fortuny" dome designed specifically for easy transport, within the span of a mere two days. Ticket sales covered only some of the troupes' costs; in 1933–1934, during the height of Italy's economic depression, the OND dedicated over a fifth of its annual net expenditures to the workings of the Carri di Tespi. The troupes reached an impressively large public—the Milan "brigade" held 116 performances in sixty towns for a public of 228,000; the Florence brigade toured 83 towns in central Italy during the same year, performing 108 times for audiences totaling 292,000 people.[45] Thousands more tuned into EIAR stations from Milan, Rome, and Turin to hear live broadcasts from the outdoor theaters in rural Italy in a reversal of the earlier broadcasts from urban theaters to country homes.

In its role as a mobile arm of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro, the Carro di Tespi Lirico functioned much like EIAR's opera broadcasts,

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[43] The spectacular nature of the mobile stage and the theatrical cars has led Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg and Michael Steinberg to conclude that the operas themselves were "secondary to the technology of performance as a portable, reproducible spectacle." Jeffrey Schnapp has similarly argued that the fascist regime's theatrical politics of spectacle meant that the medium of the theatrical cars was the message, meant to forge national unity by "promoting interregional tourism and by placing the Italian masses face to face with the past, present and future 'Mediterranean solar genius of their race.'" Steinberg and Stewart-Steinberg, "Fascism and the Operatic Unconscious," in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 267–88; and Schnapp, *Staging Fascism*, 22–23.

[44] In some towns, an estimated two-thirds of the entire population could be accommodated within the bleachers surrounding the stage; in Milan, Turin, and Rome the amphitheater could be augmented to hold up to 10,000 attendees.

[45] The most detailed account of the activities of the Carri di Tespi can be found in pamphlets published by the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro. See, for example, *L'Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro* (Rome: Società editrice di novissima, 1936), 30–41. Further details about the role of the OND's role in directing and implementing the Carro di Tespi can be found in De Grazia, *Culture of Consent*, 163.

collapsing space and reproducing the operatic experience for listeners around the nation. The Carro di Tespi was determined to address the so-called theatrical crisis by creating a new audience for the theater and altering the ways in which audiences related to the theatrical spectacle. To this end, the traveling theaters gave arena performances to sold-out crowds in piazzas throughout Italy. The theater's mobility was central to the efficacy of its expressed mission to disseminate a unified language and (re)connect Italians outside urban centers with their national operatic heritage.[46] Moreover, the fact that the company presented the same performance in the same theater to every audience—large or small, urban or rural, city or town—was crucial to its mission of indoctrinating audiences into a united identity. Although the theatrical cars performed in different communities each day, the repetitiveness of the performances created the illusion that the performance occurring at any given time was identical to all other performances across the nation. The very possibility of forming a unified identity through participation in the Carro di Tespi's audience required that listeners in Littoria experience the same opera in the same way as those in Milan, or Matera, or Salerno. With the introduction of on-location broadcasts of the Carro di Tespi's performances, the illusion was extended even further, inching closer to a vision in which anyone, at nearly any time, could hear exactly the same performance of the traveling theater from anywhere in the nation.

Broadcasts of performances by the Carro di Tespi Lirico extended the boundaries of the arena and exponentially increased the number of listeners. In a review of the first broadcast of the Carro di Tespi Lirico from an outdoor stage in Milan in August of 1931, theater critic Alberto Casella wrote: "The crowd is contemplative, a show in itself. How many are we?... The figure is at least in the tens of thousands, if not more. Even more amazing is the peaceful and sedate order contained within this enormous hive; an ideal discipline that rules the spirits and restrains the instincts, a

[46] Language would prove central to the endeavors of the opera cars, which also sought to address the problem of disseminating the national language as part of the project of promoting the regime's spiritual and intellectual reclamation of the Italian people. Gramsci identified the regime's preoccupation with creating a unified language as manifesting in relation to a series of other concerns, including "the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize the cultural hegemony"; Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 357.

religious serenity of mind that has… the joyful expectation of an exceptional evening in an almost mystical climate."[47] In Casella's framing, the crowd's procession to the outdoor opera house became a spiritual pilgrimage and the musical performance a means of reeducating the masses. Casella's description of the theater as a hive recalled late-nineteenth-century studies of crowd psychology by Scipio Sighele, for whom the bee was a central analogy for the behavior of crowds. But in contrast with Sighele's disorderly, panicked hive, Casella described the crowd as docile and calm, even capable of self-reflection, possessed of a mildness that was the direct result of the performance and the atmosphere surrounding it.

Whether or not the broadcast would have a similar effect on the listening audience at home as the live performance had on its attendees depended on how radio listeners responded to the medium's claims of simultaneity. As with broadcasts directly from the indoor opera house, the technological difficulty of broadcasting from an outdoor theater stemmed from the engineers' desire to make the final product sound as close to a studio recording as possible. The engineering and technological challenges of transmitting opera from an outdoor theater far exceeded those of broadcasting from either an indoor theater or the studio, environments where ambient noise, echo, and reverberation could be planned for and controlled. Elements of the temporary stage, designed to be constructed and broken down within the space of a few hours, were less than ideal for recording. The lack of a stage apron meant that singers and orchestra were crowded together, with no possibility of installing microphones to record voices and instruments separately. The absence of a roof and walls resulted in the diffusion of sound waves, rather than the reverberation that was necessary to produce a good recording, and made it impossible to control ambient noise and interference from the sounds of the audience. Yet despite these obstacles, broadcasts of the traveling cars maintained a constant presence on EIAR stations, occurring weekly throughout the summer months. While expounding on the disadvantages of broadcasting from the outdoor theater, Casella wrote: "The difficulties of executing it were so great as to seem insurmountable. And yet one can say that the Duce's motto 'live dangerously' should be applied, by EIAR, to its many accomplishments, changing it to 'broadcast dangerously.'" [48] The many

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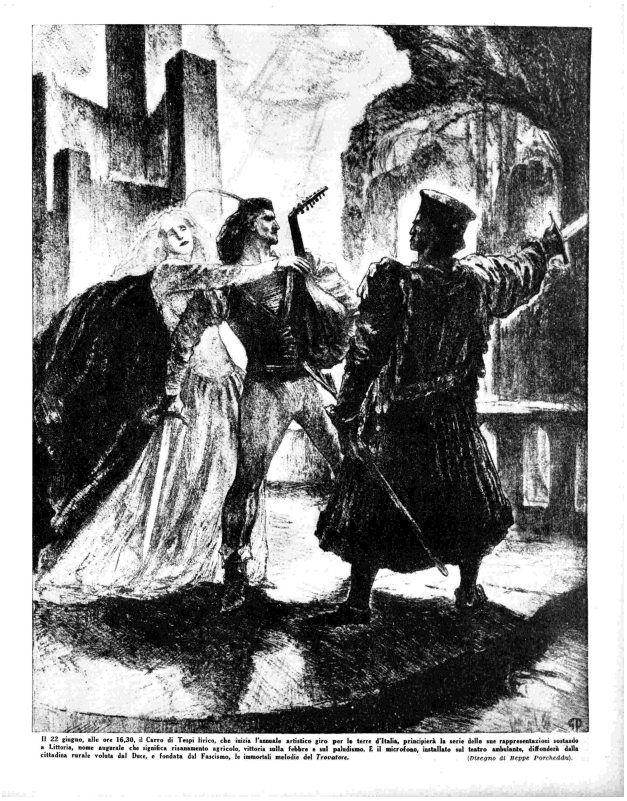
[47] Alberto Casella, "Trasmissioni eccezionali dal 'Carro di Tespi,'" *Radiocorriere,* Aug. 1–8, 1931, 9.
[48] Casella, "Trasmissioni eccezionali," 9.

challenges served as proof to Casella that the network had successfully answered Mussolini's call to arms. Furthermore, fulfilling the role set out by the regime justified the effort expended to broadcast the performance.

One political function that broadcasts of the Carro di Tespi performed was to serve as evidence for urban listeners of the regime's ongoing work in rural parts of the nation, particularly the project of *bonifica*. The contrast between urban and rural spaces came to the forefront of EIAR advertising for a broadcast of the 1933 season opener, Giuseppe Verdi's *Il trovatore,* performed by the Carro di Tespi in the main piazza of Littoria (present-day Latina), just over 60 kilometers from the heart of Rome (see fig. 1.1). Like so many canonic operas, *Il trovatore* is a tale of mistaken identity. Most Verdi fans would recognize the tragic tale of two brothers separated by class, secrets, and a gypsy's curse. The Act 1 trio "Di geloso amor sprezzato," in which Leonora, beloved of both brothers, struggles to prevent a duel between the Count and her lover Manrico, inspired the art for a full page advertising the broadcast in *Radiocorriere*.



Il 22 giugno, alle ore 16,30, il Carro di Tespi lirico, che inizia l'annuale artistico giro per le terre d'Italia, principierà la serie delle sue rappresentazioni sostando a Littoria, nome augurale che significa risorgimento agricolo, vittoria sulla febbre e sul paludismo. E il microfono, installato sul teatro ambulante, diffonderà dalla cittadina rurale voluta dal Duce, e fondata dal Fascismo, le immortali melodie del *Trovatore*.

(Disegno di Beppe Porcheddu).

Figure 1.1: Advertisement for the Carro di Tespi Lirico's performance of *Il trovatore* in Littoria. *Radiocorriere,* June 18-25, 1933, 7.

The illustrator, Giuseppe (Beppe) Porcheddu (best known for his illustrations for Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*), elected not to represent the Fortuny dome, that marvel of modern theater technology, or any of the numerous actors and singers from the troupe. Instead, his illustration depicted the moment when the Count challenges the troubadour to a duel, without realizing that his rival in love is also his kinsman. In an opera filled with scenes of narration—perhaps the easiest operatic moments to re-create on the radio—the duel in the garden emerges as one of the most visually dynamic episodes. In Porcheddu's illustration, Leonora clings to the back of the musician, who clutches a lute in one hand and pushes her protectively behind him with the other. The Count, seen only in profile, brandishes a sword that extends beyond the frame. Behind him looms the shadow of a threatening tree; behind the lovers towers the palazzo, whose angular architecture is more reminiscent of early twentieth-century modernism than fifteenth-century Spain.

The illustration made visible the dualities at the center of the operatic plot—dark and light, good and evil, commoner and noble—and added another: civilization and nature. The text below the advertisement read, "On the 22nd of June at 4:30 P.M. the Carro di Tespi Lirico, which begins its annual artistic tour through Italy, will open the season at Littoria, the auspiciously named town that represents agricultural reclamation and victory over malaria. The microphone installed on the traveling theater will broadcast, from this rural city desired by the Duce and founded by Fascism, the immortal melodies of *Il trovatore*." In the same issue of *Radiocorriere*, EIAR announced the broadcast with the following description:

> On Thursday the 22nd of June the lyric season of the "Carro di Tespi" began in Littoria, the town that arose, through the will of the Duce, as if by enchantment from the marshes and the scrub, evidence of the innovative spirit and creative strength of fascism… EIAR will bring its microphones into the beautiful piazza crowded with the rural workers who, leaving the tools of their usual work for a few hours, will be able to revive their spirits by enjoying one of the most popular and powerful operas by Verdi: *Il trovatore*, with the worthiest performers. All the principal EIAR stations will broadcast, from one end of the peninsula to another, not just the beautiful opera but also

the fervent, enthusiastic applause of the grateful workers.[49]

Named for the lictor, the bearer of the fasces in ancient Rome, Littoria stood as a prominent example of the fascist "New Towns" constructed during the 1920s and 1930s on the island of Sardegna and in the Pontine Marshes south of Rome, the result of a series of land reclamation programs that aimed to transform marshlands into fertile agricultural lands. In the Pontine Marshes, the program drained some 75,000 hectares of marshland and constructed New Town characterized by rationalist planning and architecture.[50] Media representation of the process was key to its success. By the early 1930s, newsreels and radio broadcasts carried the process of reclamation—the draining of the swamps, building of the houses, and resettlement of the people—throughout Italy.

Littoria's main piazza with its iconic tower—in front of which the Carro di Tespi Lirico would raise their stage—featured in many newsreels as a visible reminder of the regime's project to transform the swampland of the Agro Pontino into arable soil. One such newsreel, titled "Il teatro per il popolo," featured the 1933 performance of the Carro di Tespi Lirico in Littoria.[51] From the opening titles, which highlighted the "modern theater" and "superb edition" of *Il trovatore* to be performed by the company, the newsreel revealed the contradictory forces of tradition and modernity at the heart of the enterprise. The first frames show static images of the traveling carts of Thespis, whose itinerant troupes of actors provided the mythological "original" on which the Carri di Tespi were modeled. In the film, these illustrations of actors in the conical hats of mimes characteristic of the Commedia dell'Arte, standing in the middle of a piazza filled with riveted peasants, transition abruptly into an aerial shot of Rome, with the Altare della Patria (the Altar of the Nation, a late-nineteenth-century monument built to honor Vittorio Emanuele II, the first king of the united Italy) dominating the top center. A line of cars, presumably carrying the materials and people necessary to construct the outdoor stage, snake

[49] "Settimana Radiofonica," *Radiocorriere,* June 18–25, 1933, 19.
[50] For a detailed exploration of the Fascist New Towns, see Antonio Pennacchi, *Fascio e martello: viaggio per le città del duce* (Rome: Laterza, 2010). For more on connections between medical discourse and New Town architecture, see Federico Caprotti, "Malaria and Technological Networks: Medical Geography in the Pontine Marshes, Italy in the 1930s," *Geographical Journal* 172, no. 2 (2006), 145–55.
[51] Giornale Luce, *Il Teatro per Il Popolo*, Newsreel B0292 (Rome: Istituto Luce Cinecittà, 07/1933).

toward the bottom of the screen. The angle of the camera gives the impression of the trucks emerging directly from the Altare della Patria itself, an effect reinforced by the subsequent closeups of the trucks with "Carro di Tespi Lirico" inscribed on the side and the Altare della Patria rising above them in the background. The sequence of images serves to construct a dual origin story for the Carro di Tespi Lirico, suggesting that it has roots in both the ancient rural tradition of traveling theaters and the modern urban monuments of united Italy. Subsequent shots of the trucks moving past the Coliseum and rural farmlands further enhance the sense that the traveling theater cars emerged from both traditions, or worlds, but moved beyond them—what they moved to remains unclear in the film until the cars finally stop in the piazza of Littoria, with the central tower rising victoriously in the background. Thus the opening of the newsreel staged the odyssey of the trucks emerging from one set of monuments, with their roots in ancient Rome and united Italy, and coming to rest in front of a new monument, the town hall, a visible symbol of the regime's land reclamation.

The rest of the newsreel showed the setup of the traveling theater, with stagehands climbing the scaffold as Littoria's central tower loomed behind them, followed by a short clip from the performance itself. Apart from a long-distance shot of the side of the Fortuny dome, this part of the newsreel showcases the faces of the audience. The population of Littoria, in an uncanny foreshadowing of the rural family who would appear seven years later in *Ecco la radio!*, face the stage in complete silence, utterly focused, dressed in the clothes of the working classes and arranged in orderly formation on bleachers or standing along the sides and back of the piazza. The musical accompaniment to the scene is the trio "Di geloso amor sprezzato," which featured so prominently in the advertisement for the EIAR broadcast. The music was likely recorded on site at the same time, and through the same microphones, as the radio broadcast, and therefore can offer clues as to how the broadcast may have sounded to listeners. While the "stitching" performed by the film makes it appear that the shots of audience members occurred simultaneously with the performance of the act 1 trio, the likelihood is that these images were obtained over the course of the entire performance and edited together with the music during the final preparations of the newsreel. They represent the editor's reimagining of what the audience of a theatrical performance in the new Italy should look like—a productive and orderly populace with their mouths closed, their faces rapt, and their eyes focused on a distant horizon. If the newsreel sought to represent model fascist subjects in the enjoyment of a new kind of

fascist performance, it also endeavored to attach this performance to a long political and aesthetic history based in both ancient and modern Italian traditions.[52]

Like the newsreel, the radio broadcast of the Carro di Tespi Lirico would serve as evidence to Italians living outside the Agro Pontino of the success of the regime's reclamation projects as well as of its generosity in providing cultural events for those citizens recently relocated to New Towns. Unlike the newsreel, however, which required time to produce and disseminate and a public venue armed with a projector to watch, the broadcast provided a means for Italian citizens, both at home and abroad, to hear opera at the same time as listeners in Littoria, from the comfort of their own homes: a venue wherein the national public could participate collectively in the activities of the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro. The simultaneity of the broadcast allowed for instantaneous participation from listeners all around Italy, whose "presence"—albeit mediated—made them open to the healthful benefits of the process of *bonificà*. The broadcast took a remnant of Italy's operatic past, the "immortal" melodies of *Il trovatore*, and electrified it, transforming it into audible proof of the process of reclamation and the modern technologies of the new Italy. And it did so in a way that no other medium—newsreels, recordings, or print media—could match.

Radio's capacity to endow transmitted sounds with authority would continue to prove invaluable to the regime over the subsequent decade. In the fall of 1941, the Carro di Tespi Lirico traveled to the parts of the Dalmatian coast occupied by fascist troops. The troupe had already performed several of these "ambassadorial" trips to locations in Europe and South America, but the political circumstances made this voyage unique. Less than six months earlier, following the 1941 invasion of Yugoslavia, the nation had been divided into the Independent State of Croatia (occupied by Nazi Germany) and the Italian Governate of Dalmatia. During the Carro di Tespi Lirico's fifteen-day trip, the company of 300 presented fourteen performances of Italian opera, including Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*, to some 131,000 spectators. Performances were broadcast back to listeners at

[52] These contradictory mythologies would come to the foreground even more explicitly in a 1938 performance by the Carro di Tespi Lirico of Verdi's *Aida*, staged outside the Coliseum with the backdrop of the Arch of Constantine as part of a series of events celebrating the third International Congress of the Dopolavoro, titled "Lavoro e Gioia."

home on EIAR and highlighted on the broadcast "Trenta minuti nel mondo," which described the "active promotion of art" by the Carro di Tespi that "offered a pleasant spark to these glorious regions just lately reunited to the Nation."[53] Between musical numbers, broadcasts reminded Italian listeners that the region shared their ancient lineage by lauding the beauty of the newly acquired territory, the "home of the Roman emperor Diocletian and of great Italians like Tommaseo and Rismondo, cradle of music like [the works of] Suppè, center of fertile commerce and industry, magnificent and generous mother of intrepid fighters, [which] possesses a thousand artistic and political reasons to capture the patriotic attention of our listeners."[54] Transmissions faithfully recreated every audible detail of the performance from beginning to end—including the tuning of the orchestra and the applause of the grateful spectators. Once again the political efficacy of the broadcasts depended on an exact recreation of events and subsequent transportation of the listener into the sounding space, whether the original source lay in the reconstructed countryside or the new-made colony. As a goodwill ambassador, the traveling troupe was fleeting, moving between at least five locations during their two-week stay. But as a not-so-subtle reminder of Dalmatia's Roman heritage and evidence of the generosity of the occupying power, the Carro di Tespi's Dalmatian tour sent a signal to both the live audience and listeners at home that the nation's colonial efforts were not only successful but justified.

De-concentrating the Network

Through technical manipulation and circulation in tandem with other media, the opera broadcasts of the 1920s and 1930s sought to shape listeners even as the project of reclamation sought to reshape the Italian landscape. Broadcasts from EIAR studios and opera houses demonstrated to the regime the value of transporting listeners from private homes to public opera houses and from urban to rural spaces. By tracing the intersecting networks of dissemination represented by the Carro di Tespi Lirico and their transmissions, we can further map the political and cultural impact of opera on the airwaves during the fascist *ventennio*. The image of airwaves radiating out from a central point of transmission, disseminating musical

[53] "Dopolavoro," *Radiocorriere,* Nov. 9–15, 1941, 8.
[54] "Dopolavoro," *Radiocorriere,* Nov. 9–15, 1941, 8.

programming determined by a central authority in Rome, fosters a model of fascist cultural engineering that may be deceptively centralized—or at least one that fails to capture the full picture. Such top-down accounts of Italian fascism, particularly those relating to its cultural manifestations, are fueled in part by Mussolini's own mediated self-representation as a star playing the central role in a political drama. The project of colonizing the Italian people through opera, and of transmitting the success of that endeavor over the radio, would seem to align perfectly with such a straightforward narrative. But by the late 1920s opera in Italy was not unidirectional, but broadcast from multiple locations in urban theaters and rural towns. The apparent unity of these broadcasts masked heterogeneity and fracture and depended on elaborate technological and mechanical interventions to create the illusion of fidelity.

There is evidence to suggest that the controlling ambitions of radio producers were further undermined by the actual practices of their listeners, since the impact of the network's attempts to permeate the private space of the home with the orthodoxies of the political sphere depended as much on the emotional and intellectual investment of the listeners as on the forces who produced and broadcast the content. Even Adorno admitted that radio's totalitarian potential could be undermined by practices of distracted listening.[55] Indeed, a cartoon by the popular painter and illustrator Giuseppe Novello poked fun at the idea that listeners at home would direct their full attention to an opera on the radio. Titled "If We Listened to the Opera in the Theater as We Listen to It on the Radio at Home," the illustration pictured a very different audience from the rapt family gazing at their radio set described at the beginning of this chapter. In the front row of Novello's cartoon, a woman knits socks beside a man picking his nose and an amorous couple. A man soaks his feet, a woman darns stockings, and other listeners read, sleep, eat, shave, or gamble. Far from being caught up in the throes of musical ecstasy, Novello's audience constitutes at best a group of distracted listeners, for whom the music

[55] There is a surprising tension between Adorno's claims about the totalitarian radio voice and his equally anxious theories relating to distracted listening. As David Goodman has shown, casual and distracted listening was a topic of concern not only to Adorno but also to many of his contemporaries, and was largely viewed in opposition to radio's educational benefits. David Goodman, "Distracted Listening: On Not Making Sound Choices in the 1930s," in *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ed. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 15–46.

functions as mere background to the drama of their daily lives.[56] The cartoon is a vivid, irreverent reminder that the fantasies of one-way transmission and rapt reception were disrupted, re-routed, and thwarted by individual foibles and everyday distractions as a matter of course.

[56] In her study of oral history testimonies by working-class people in Turin, Luisa Passerini argued that resistance to the fascist regime could take the form of commonplace rebellious acts, including humor, whether or not they impaired the effectiveness of fascist policy. In this light, we might read opera audiences' failure to listen as active, if fleeting, resistance to the phantasmagoria and the regime it represented. See Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class,* trans. Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); originally published as *Torino operaia e Fascismo* (Rome: Laterza, 1984).

Chapter 2: "Capturing the Vital Spirit"

ORCHESTRA

(Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata playing throughout)

FIRST MALE VOICE

This music is broadcast directly from the moon
The orchestra is drawn from the entire earthly landscape, trees hills rivers reflections
It can be heard because we receive it directly with a new thermionic valve invented by an Italian genius whose name does not need repeating
Beethoven therefore did not create this music he transcribed it as he received it by means of the natural thermionic valves with which his brain was most certainly endowed
To prevent the world from disturbing these cosmic receptions of his he became deaf
And so he died happy[1]

An electrified Ludwig van Beethoven, a radio receiver capable of discerning even the faintest of signals transmitted directly from the moon— this is the subject of the 1941 radio synthesis "Beethoven" by Pino Masnata. The poem, one of several *sintesi radiofoniche* ("radio syntheses") by the Italian futurist, was conceived as a script for radio broadcast with instructions for both musical accompaniment and sound effects. It called for an orchestra to play the "Moonlight Sonata" while a "solo masculine voice" read text describing the special abilities endowed by the "natural thermionic valves" in the composer's brain. The poem was never performed on the airwaves. Instead, Masnata published "Beethoven" with eight of his own radio syntheses and five by his friend and the founder of the Italian futurist movement, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, in a 1941 issue of the journal *Autori e scrittori*. Thus the "synthesis" was preserved for future generations, not as a sound-based, radiophonic performance, but as a text to be read.

Nevertheless, "Beethoven" hints at the extraordinary potential futurists saw in the emerging medium of radio, both as a platform for artistic expression and as a tool for constructing a new, "futuristic" world. In

[1] Translation from Margaret Fisher, "Radio Sintesi by Pino Masnata," *Italogramma* 4 (2012), 467–468.

the poem's vision, the musician was a human-radio hybrid, naturally sensitive to the vibration of radio waves already present in the universe around him, his genius the result of a bizarre techno-evolutionary process that gave him access to signals that the average human failed to perceive. This was not the first time that Masnata imagined a future in which technology could endow a human with artificially-enhanced senses: in 1940, he asked, "Could it be that to create simply means to tap into mysterious waves? Think how much less beauty there would be in the world if we did not possess these two receivers of light and sound waves that we call eyes and ears. Think how much more beauty there would be in the world if we possessed other receivers for waves of different frequencies that we're certain to have surrounding us."[2] "Beethoven" addressed an audience of the future, a population that, like Beethoven, would hear not with their ears but through a technologically-enhanced body that would give them access to the universal vibrations all around them. Through implantation of a "thermionic valve" (vacuum tubes that, by controlling the flow of electrons, were used to demodulate AM radio signals) the future populace would be able to access the same signals that led the great German composer to write his famous "Moonlight Sonata." Masnata makes clear that his imagined audience possessed this expanded sensory ability immediately at the outset of the poem, with the line, "This music is transmitted directly from the moon," referencing the sounds of the "Moonlight Sonata" playing in the background. The fact that the poem was never performed makes such a reading all the more poignant—as if it were never intended to be heard over the radio, but instead continues to wait for that future audience of more receptive listeners.

The process of humans becoming technological—and vice versa—permeated futurist creative output.[3] The founding manifesto of futurism, composed by Marinetti in 1909, identified modern technologies of speed with the capacity to overcome time and space, leading to a new secular mysticism that held up technology as the source of a new aesthetic and moral salvation.[4] Six years later, in his essay "Extended Man and the

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[2] Pino Masnata, *Radia: A Gloss of the 1933 Futurist Radio Manifesto*, Margaret Fisher, ed. (Emeryville: Second Evening Art Publishing, 2012), 95.
[3] Roger Griffin, "The Multiplication of Man: Futurism's Technolatry Viewed Through the Lens of Modernism," in *Futurism and the Technological Imagination,* ed. Günter Berghaus (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 77–99; Arndt Niebitsch, "Cruel Media: On F. T. Marinetti's Media Aesthetics," *Annali d'Italianistica* 27 (2009), 333–48.
[4] See Griffin, "The Multiplication of Man: Futurism's Technology."

Kingdom of the Machine," Marinetti envisioned man transformed into a nonhuman, mechanical species, one whose will would "rule supreme over conquered Space and Time." Among the strengths of this new species would be the elimination of "moral anguish, goodness, affection and love," which Marinetti termed the "only off-switches of our powerful, physiological electricity."[5] The poet was consumed with admiration for those with "great mechanical intuition," particularly engine drivers; he predicted the physical development of an "external protrusion of the sternum, resembling a prow… given that man, in the future, will become an increasingly better aviator." But if Marinetti's mechanized man resembled the new technologies of transportation, Masnata's Beethoven exhibited a synergy between mind and technology that echoed contemporary discourse surrounding the development of radiotelegraphy and the human body. Already during the nineteenth-century, writers had adopted various physiological networks, particularly the nervous system, as a metaphor for new communications systems.[6] Physiologists like Emil Dubois-Raymond viewed the technological system as mapping onto the psychological one: "The similarity between the two apparatus, the nervous system and the electric telegraph . . . is more than similarity; it is a kinship between the two, an agreement not merely of the effects, but also perhaps of the causes."[7] Like Dubois-Raymond, Masnata viewed the technological network as a useful model for understanding the organic means by which the human brain transmits information and impulses. But while the nineteenth-century physiologist used the example of a wire-based communications system to describe the neural network, Masnata relied on a new

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[5] F.T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), 15.

[6] Laura Otis has shown how the tendency to view communications devices as extensions of the human nervous system spread during the nineteenth century in response to the invention of the telegraph. As Otis demonstrates, the scientists and engineers who designed telegraphic networks viewed their creations as organic webs. Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[7] The perceived similarity between neural networks and communications systems led to a rising interest in studying telepathy and mind-to-mind communication. Beginning in 1924, organizations like Scientific American's Psychic Investigation Committee and the Society for Psychical Research even conducted telepathic experiments over radio. See Anthony Enns, "Psychic Radio: Sound Technologies, Ether Bodies and Spiritual Vibrations," *The Senses and Society* 2 (2008), 137–152.

technology—the wireless radio—to imagine an electrified, radiophonic genius.

For Marinetti and Masnata, the ether—that invisible, ubiquitous material supposed to act as the vehicle for the vibrations of electromagnetic waves—was a seductive concept useful for blurring the lines between man and machine. The 1933 "Futurist Radio Manifesto," written by Masnata and co-signed by Marinetti, was the first time the futurists applied their theories on performance and technology explicitly to radio.[8] In the manifesto, the two futurists called for an art that would transform the body itself into a kind of receiver. Seven years later, in an unpublished explication of the manifesto, Masnata described radio as a herald of fundamental changes awaiting the human brain, one that would unlock a secret universe of "trapped waves and of waves that are constantly shifting" and reveal "the trembling soul, the living essence of flowers or metals, the voice of God."[9] "Will we, in the future," he wondered, "become radio receivers without the radio apparatus?"[10] The omnipresence of electromagnetic waves and the possibility that human beings could become sensitive enough receivers to pick up these signals were central elements of the manifesto's aesthetic claims. Futurist art for radio, Masnata and Marinetti argued, must intercept and amplify those vibrations already reverberating through the universe, including the voices of dead spirits and those of gems and flowers.[11] Thus the new art, *la radia*, would abolish the dependence of existing radio production on theater, literature, and film in favor of the radical disavowal of narrative, unity of action, time, and space.

This chapter will examine how Italian futurism drew on contemporary scientific studies and theories of vibration and waves to develop a vibrant, tactile radio listening experience. Studying the first

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[8] Marinetti and Masnata first published M*anifesto futurista della radio* in the Torino *Gazzetta del Popolo* on September 22, 1933. This was the second major Italian treatise on radio, following Enzo Ferrieri's *Radio come forza creativa*, published in 1931.

[9] Fisher, "Futurism and Radio," 257.

[10] Margaret Fisher, "'The Art of Radia': Pino Masnata's Unpublished Gloss to the *Futurist Radio Manifesto*," *Modernism/modernity* 19, no. 1 (January 2012), 166.

[11] A response to the manifesto printed in the magazine *World-Radio* humorously advised: "Broadcasting is a medium which must take account of all movements, aesthetic and otherwise, but it appears to us that Futurism applied to that medium, as outlined in this manifesto, needs to be taken in homeopathic doses." "Futurism and Broadcasting," *World-Radio,* Oct. 7 1933, 1.

decades of Italian radio makes confronting the futurist movement inevitable, even though no substantial body of work was produced by futurists for radio, notwithstanding repeated calls by Marinetti for more futurist performance art and radio productions. Nevertheless, the futurists remained the most vocal and powerful avant-garde movement during the fascist *ventennio*, and therefore their theories are a necessary consideration in any study of artistic production of the period. Although scholars typically focus on Marinetti, the movement's founder and the prolific writer of hundreds of manifestos, this chapter concentrates instead on the work of Pino Masnata, whose contributions to the movement, although often overshadowed by his outspoken friend, were particularly significant in the realm of theorizing and writing for futurist radio. In addition to the *Radio Manifesto*, Masnata wrote the texts for a number of futurist radio dramas, including the first Italian opera composed for radio, *Il cuore di Wanda*. I examine Masnata's works for and about radio with the goal of explaining how ethereal waves and mechanical radios projected a social body that buttressed the futurist project to transform both the human body and the soul into electromagnetically-enhanced technologies. In the first section, I explore how the wave character of broadcasting technologies constructed a new framework for listening and performing that inspired speculation about using radio to access, shape, modify, and amplify the human body. These sections will consider two meanings of the term "radio": the medium, composed of waves that transmitted sound between distant points; and the transmitting and receiving mechanisms that made this process possible. In the second section, I reveal that *Il cuore di Wanda* drew on themes and images present in both futurist and popular radio programs relating to the amplification and electrification of the human body. In the third section, I argue that current scholarly work on the drive to metallize man has overlooked the important influence radio played in shaping the human-technological hybrid of the futurist imagination. Finally, I show that these altered human bodies and spirits in some ways proved resistant to the fascist project of making Italians.

Vibrating Matter

Tracing the tangible process of vibration through which sound is produced encourages us to embrace the event character of historical production and experience, the accidents and chaos that surrounded the birth of many new

technologies, including radio.[12] While avoiding a technological determinism that views technical development as the promise of a wireless paradise, we must acknowledge that at the heart of debates surrounding the early years of radio lay its contrast to earlier wired technologies like the telegraph and telephone. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan viewed radio as contradictory, different in kind from earlier communications technologies, at once a "violent, unified implosion and resonance," and an intimate experience.[13] In an uncanny echo of Dubois-Raymond's words from 100 years prior, McLuhan compared radio to humanity's internal communications system: "Even more than telephone or telegraph, radio is that extension of the central nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself."[14] The comparison lies in marked contrast, for example, to the claims of Friedrich Kittler that wireless radio was a continuation of the military impulse that produced earlier recording technologies: "The media don't emerge from the human body, rather you have, for example, the book, and the military generals in considering how they can subvert the book or the written word, come up with the telegraph, namely, the telegraph wire; and then to offset the military telegraph, they come up with the wireless radio, which Hitler builds into his tanks."[15] In Kittler's formulation, radio emerged directly from military research into the wired telegraph, making the wireless technology merely an improvement upon the existing, earthbound technologies. McLuhan's model evokes a comparison between radio and another of its technological antecedents, one that played a crucial role in the futurist understanding of the medium's potential impact: the X-ray machine.

The discovery of X-rays by Wilhelm Röntgen in 1895 paved the way

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[12] Other emerging technologies have been similarly shaped as much by their failures as by their successes. Carolyn Abbate has shown how the microphone, for example, changed the way sound was used in early Hollywood film, due to the largely accidental discovery of its ability to capture the vibrations of sound waves inaudible to the human ear. See Carolyn Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 69, no. 3 (December 1, 2016), 793–829.

[13] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 300.

[14] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 302.

[15] Matthew Griffin, Susanne Herrmann, and Friedrich A. Kittler, "Technologies of Writing: Interview with Friedrich A. Kittler," *New Literary History* 27, no. 4 (1996), 731–42. See also Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999).

for their eventual use in medical diagnosis and therapy.[16] Like light and radio waves, X-rays are a type of electromagnetic radiation created by oscillating electric and magnetic fields moving at the speed of light. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the movement of waves, an observable physical process, was imagined to occur through the medium of "ether," an imperceptible substance that filled all empty space. Radio waves, gamma rays, X-rays and light were all understood to be the result of the vibration of this ether, whether on a cosmic or atomic scale, in response to propulsion by a wave. With the increasing popularity of radio came a widespread interest in the physics that made the technology possible, a development that can be traced in the pages of EIAR's weekly magazine *Radiocorriere*. In addition to program listings, celebrity biographies and radio news, *Radiocorriere* printed regular columns intended to educate readers on new discoveries in physics. In 1930, a *Radiocorriere* article titled "La vita: un complesso di oscillazioni" drew on controversial engineer George Lakhovsky's research on radiation and cellular oscillation to support the claim that "life is born of radiation and can be ended by any oscillatory imbalance."[17] The author described a universe composed entirely of shifting, oscillating waves: the spectrum "passes progressively, based on the number of vibrations per second, from the wavelength of stations for wireless telegraphy, transoceanic and transcontinental, to the wavelengths of the colors of the light spectrum and, from these, to those of the rays coming from cosmic space, of an as yet unknown wavelength, which the mind of man imagines and calculates, but which his means still do not permit him to measure."[18] Although Einstein's special theory of relativity challenged the principles underlying the ether hypothesis, the electromagnetic spectrum remained the starting point of

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[16] X-ray machines arrived in Italy more than two decades prior to radio technologies. By 1896, physicians in Naples had used mobile X-rays to locate bullets in the arms of two soldiers injured while fighting in Italy's Ethiopia campaign. Alexi Assmus, "Early History of X-Rays." *Beam Line* 25, no. 2, 10–25.

[17] The controversial engineer's book *The Secret of Life: Electricity, Radiation and Your Body* in 1929 claimed that health was determined by the relative health of electromagnetic oscillations in living cells, and that pathogens and cancers caused interference with these oscillations. Lakhovsky also invented the Multiple Wave Oscillator, a device that produced multiple wavelengths, which Lakhovsky claimed could improve cell health. See Georges Lakhovsky, *Le Secret de La Vie: Les Ondes Cosmiqes et La Radiation Vitale* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1925).

[18] Mario La Stella, "La Vita: Un complesso di oscillazioni infinite," *Radiocorriere,* Oct. 4–11, 1930, 55.

discussions of waves. "The evidence that light radiation, X-rays and radio rays all consist of waves," one *Radiocorriere* article about Einstein's revelations began, "is so familiar that it is not necessary to discuss further."[19] A 1931 "Technical Dictionary" entry about the scientific principles behind radio broadcasting similarly defined a wave as "the result of movement in a vibrating medium… this vibrating medium, be it water (waves of the sea) or air or other elastic medium (sound waves) or cosmic ether (visible light, heat, electromagnetic phenomena)… And everything we have so far described can also be applied to radio."[20] In Italy the popular understanding of both radio and X-rays was that they were two technologies taking advantage of the same physical process: the movement of a wave vibrating through the ether.

Vibration lay at the heart of another conceptual link between electromagnetic waves and sound waves. Both were understood to be the result of vibrations transmitted through different media: sound waves through air, X-ray and radio waves through ether. This in-kind relationship between different types of waves was in fact central to the process of radio broadcasting, in which sound waves, passed through a microphone (a type of transducer) were converted from acoustical energy into electrical energy. The resulting current was first amplified, then added to a carrier wave through a process called modulation. The process was reversed in the receiver, which would then transform the electrical current back into sound waves. The similarity between different types of waves brought with it the possibility of surprising crossover effects between various types of sound and electromagnetic waves. In 1926, a news dispatch from Birmingham, Alabama described a phenomenon in which researchers manipulating a searchlight from a high building were heard speaking over several radio antennas in the vicinity. A report on the incident, printed two months later in *Radiocorriere*, hypothesized that such a phenomenon was the result, not of the effect of light on radio waves, but of another kind of wave acting on the ether: "Some maintain that arc lights from lighthouses may have produced violet rays capable of ionizing the ether, thus producing a channel to transmit voices through the air. Many technicians object that violet rays, the shortest of the visible rays in the spectrum, probably cannot have a wavelength short enough to ionize the ether. It seems more logical to assume that the intense

[19] "Il nuovo concetto fisico dell'universo," *Radiocorriere,* Oct. 17–24, 1931, 25.
[20] Umberto Tucci, "Dizionaretto Tecnico," *Radiocorriere,* Dec. 26, 1931–Jan. 2, 1932, 26.

light produced vibrations with wavelengths shorter than that of ultra-violet rays, about which we still understand very little. These vibrations could have caused the ionization. The vibrations of the ether occur in octaves of fixed frequencies: from the smallest, which include X-rays and gamma rays, to ultraviolet rays, to light rays, to heat radiation and to the rays or vibrations that we call radio 'waves.'"[21] The transformation of sound into electromagnetic energy did not go just one way—in 1926, an *atomophone* constructed at the University of Kansas was purportedly able to make atoms audible by producing sound in response to radioactivity; in 1931, Dr. Donald H. Andrews of Johns Hopkins University, using spectrum photographs of the vibrations of different chemical atoms, transposed those vibrations into musical chords and runs.[22]

X-rays likewise offered an array of possibilities and were used both as medical and artistic tools. During the first decades of X-ray imaging, the medical practice of radiography was closely linked to photography; photographers without any medical training were among the first to open X-ray studios.[23] Decades later, X-rays awakened the imagination of futurist Umberto Boccioni.[24] In the 1910 "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting," the painter and sculptor asked, "Who can still believe in the opacity of bodies, since our sharpened and multiplied sensitiveness has already penetrated the obscure manifestations of mediumistic phenomena? Why should we forget in our creations the doubled power of our sight, capable of giving results analogous to the X-rays?"[25] In a 1911 lecture, he identified

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[21] *Radiorario,* July 24–31, 1926, 1.

[22] H.P. Cady and John Strong, "Broadcasting the Sounds of Atoms," *Radio News*, August 1926, 108–109; D. Lindsay Watson, "Chemical Music and its Meaning," *Science News Letter* 19 (1931), 262–271.

[23] Liv Hausken, "The Aesthetics of X-Ray Imaging," in *Aesthetics at Work*, ed. Arne Melberg (Oslo: Unipub, 2007), 29–56.

[24] Boccioni was a key player in the movement Linda Dalrymple Henderson has called "vibratory modernism," a group of artists and writers around the turn of the century for whom scientific developments in the study of radiation and electromagnetic energy fueled new conceptions of the relationship between humans and technology. Dalrymple Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism," in *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature*, eds. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 133.

[25] Bocciono, "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto" in Lawrence S. Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman, eds., *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven:

"primitives of a new, completely transformed sensibility," possessed of a "psychic force that empowers the senses to perceive what has never been perceived before." Boccioni claimed that this extra sensitivity was the product of the "altered conditions of existence" resulting from scientific experiments "with steam, electricity, motor fuels, Hertzian waves and all the researches of chemistry and biology."[26] Boccioni's reference to Heinrich Hertz, whose research first proved James Clerk Maxwell's theories of electromagnetic waves, encompassed radio and X-rays, gamma rays and light into a single artistic palette. His equation of the X-ray to an extension of human sight foreshadowed McLuhan's later claim to technology as an extension of the human, and what Masnata would later develop in his theory of radio: the transformation of the human into a supersensitive receiver of all kinds of waves.

Electromagnetic Hearts

The futurist whose voice was most familiar to radio listeners was probably the poet Luciano Folgore, host of the long-running broadcast "Dieci minuti dell'umorismo." His program combined rhyming poetry and source material from home and humor magazines. In one broadcast, Folgore likened radio broadcasts to the emotions received by the human heart:

> Col progresso il cuore umano
> S'è cambiato in modo strano.
> L'energie molecolare,
> L'elettrone e la corrente
> L'hanno fatto diventare
> Una radio ricevente.
> Che apparecchio! Piglia tutto
> L'onde medie e l'onde corte,
> Piglia il bello, piglia il brutto
> Dei programmi della Sorte...
> Tutti i cuori anche i più vecchi
> Non son altro che apparecchi

Yale University Press, 2009), 65.
[26] Dalrymple Henderson, "Vibratory Modernism," 133.

Riceventi e selettivi.[27]

[With progress the human heart
has changed strangely.
Molecular energy,
the electron and the current
have made it into
a radio receiver.
What a device! It catches everything,
the medium wave and the short wave,
the beautiful and the ugly,
all of Fate's programs...
All hearts, even the oldest ones
are nothing but devices,
receptive and perceptive.]

Although it had little in common with the onomatopoeic visual poetry that the Futurists called "parole-in-libertà," the poem (which was most likely read aloud during a broadcast of 1932) evinced the same adulation for human-technological hybrids that pervaded Masnata's "Beethoven."[28] The poem took as its theme the transformation of the human body, specifically the heart, into a radio receiver. With said transformation accomplished, the heart could catch both the good and the evil influences ("programs") of Fate. For the final lines of the poem, Folgore turned the moral on its head; the reader (or listener) would discover that all hearts, even ancient ones uncorrupted by modern innovation, had always functioned as apparatuses

[27] Luciano Folgore papers, Getty Research Institute, Collection 910141, Box 15 (c. 1932). Cited in Fisher, ed., *Radia: A Gloss of the Futurist Radio Manifesto*, 25; translation my own.

[28] Parole-in-libertà, the poetic form theorized by Marinetti and used by many of the Futurists, has generated much of the scholarly discourse around futurism and technology, because of its syntactic efficiency, technological themes, and heavy use of onomatopoeia. Timothy Campbell has shown how Guglielmo Marconi's invention of the telegraph and subsequent interactions with wireless technologies influenced this form of futurist poetics, leading to a literary style in which Marinetti "simulates a wireless receiver that converts the sights and sounds of modern life into writing." Campbell,"Marinetti, Marconista," in *Broadcasting Modernism*, Debra Rae Cohen, Michael Coyle, and Jane Lewty, eds. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 51–65.

for receiving signals. Folgore's poem thus both reaffirmed the humanity of the heart-apparatus and emphasized its nature as a mechanical object.

Despite Folgore's signature playful tone, the suggestion that radio waves could resonate in human tissue—indeed, that the body itself could function as a kind of radio receiver—would not have seemed particularly farfetched to radio aficionados of the time. As a conductor of electricity, the human body was vulnerable to the movements of the ubiquitous, albeit invisible, waves surrounding it. In a 1926 letter to the editor of *Radiocorriere*, one listener expressed his amazement at how placing a finger on the crystal element of his radio receiver caused the volume in his headphones to increase dramatically; by touching his tongue to the receiver, he managed to hear the sounds of the broadcast even without the use of headphones.[29] In his response, the editor suggested that he experiment also with touching the antenna to a metallic bedpost or comparable object, to see how the human body could function compared to metal as a conductor of electromagnetic waves. Further experiments that exploited the body's property as a conductor of electricity involved using radio to allow the deaf to hear, to lower the body temperature of feverish patients, and to accelerate and improve brain function.[30] Such exercises conceived of the human body not simply as a medium through which waves could be conveyed from one point to another, but as a receiver in itself.

Folgore's technologized heart gestured toward another possible use of the radio, as a tool for accessing and amplifying the interior of the human body. By the early twentieth century, the invention of electric stethoscopes allowed physicians to make the sounds of a heartbeat audible throughout a room and facilitated sound recordings of amplified heartbeats. In March of 1930, Professor Gustavo Quarelli of Turin's Ospedale Maggiore extended the reach of these sounds during an hour-long transmission of different types of heartbeats. The broadcast was one of many such medical-themed broadcasts, during which doctors would illuminate the inner workings of the body, offer medical advice, and give news of the latest advances in modern medicine. Quarelli's broadcast, however, was unique in that it placed at center stage the sounds of the body at work, giving listeners access to the most intimate sounds of another person's physical ailments. An abbreviated transcript of the broadcast, released in *Radiocorriere* two weeks later, was

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[29] "Consulenza Tecnica," *Radiorario,* March 7–14, 1926, 15.

[30] "Un precedente italiano nella radioaudizione dei sordomuti," *Radiorario*, June 25, 1927, 2.; "Curiosità Scientifiche," *Radiocorriere* Oct. 18–25, 1930, 53.

accompanied by diagrams of the heart and an illustration of an ancient military surgeon listening to his patient's heartbeat with a "primitive" monaural stethoscope. This visual comparison to early mediate auscultation—listening to the body via the medium of the stethoscope—emphasized both the potential for an expanded physical distance between doctor and patient, and the possibility offered by radio for acquiring specialized audile techniques that would allow laymen to listen as doctors.

Professor Quarelli's broadcast expanded on the possibility of distant listeners hearing and diagnosing the interior of the human body; but it also sought to reverse the move that mediate auscultation had begun towards making this information available only to experts or initiates. The analogy between mediate auscultation and radio's ability to magnify and broadcast the sound of the heart was obvious not only in the illustrations but in the spoken text of the broadcast. In fact, the language of Quarelli's lecture sometimes seemed to merge with the mystical diction of futurist poetry, as in this introductory narration: "Not only will I speak to you during the brief time offered, but my voice will be united with another that we have often invoked spiritually in life, especially during those moments in which our soul is faced with crucial decisions: the voice of the heart!... Tonight you will hear the beating of the human heart, as doctors hear it, with the intense desire to know, to unravel its secrets, with the infinite passion driven by the desire to cure its symptoms."[31] As the broadcast continued, Quarelli made explicit his belief that the interface of radio could "expose" the interior of the body by amplifying even the softest sounds of a beating heart, opening the possibility for doctors to examine patients at a distance, and it could disseminate those interior sounds to the listening masses.[32] Success depended on radio's dual abilities to amplify the interior sounds of the body and to encode those sounds into an electromagnetic signal, which could be decoded by a receiver on the other end.

Wanda's Heart

We move now from a speaking heart to a singing one. Examples like

[31] "La radiotrasmissione dei battiti del cuore," *Radiocorriere* March 22–29, 1930, 7.
[32] Jonathan Sterne has argued that a similar set of beliefs characterized the development of early technologies for mediate auscultation, including the stethoscope; see Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Quarelli's broadcast demonstrate that radio offered the possibility of changing the way listeners imagined and accessed the interior of the human body by amplifying sounds that were already there to be heard. For Masnata and the other futurists, however, the medium heralded a different possibility: that of fundamentally altering the relationship between the interior of the human body and its exterior, of making the interior more sensitive and the exterior more accessible. This is the basis of *Il cuore di Wanda*, the first Italian opera for radio, with music by Carmine Guarino and lyrics by Masnata. The opera takes the heartrending tragic romance of canonic Italian opera to its most literal extreme, using standard operatic themes of love and betrayal but with a disturbing twist. The baritone Mario is intensely jealous of his beloved, Wanda, so much so that he demands that she leave her heart with him when she departs. Alone with the heart, Mario flattens it into a record, which can play only a single dance tune, "Tum tum ninna-nanna." In the end Mario, overcome by remorse, receives a telephone call from Wanda, who informs him that she has left him for another man.

Listeners to *Wanda*'s first broadcast on December 20, 1931, were witnesses to history. Finally, opera composed specifically for radio—a genre that "must be, and cannot be elsewhere than in Italy"—received marked attention in the press, particularly in *Radiocorriere*. Articles published before the premiere cited both Guarino's flawless pedigree (despite his youth, the composer had already enjoyed a successful premiere at La Scala) and the librettist Masnata's close ties to the futurist movement as the basis for the opera's anticipated success. The opera, they claimed, bridged the divide between the brash and outspoken futurist movement and more conservative schools of theatrical performance. "Maestro Guarino embroidered the tenuous plot," one critic wrote, "woven with little, bittersweet shivers of poetry, full of irony, regret and tears… into a music full of grace and sincerity."[33] The contradictions manifested in the opera—at once futuristic and conservative, ironic and sentimental—were reflected in the dual bodies inhabited by its protagonist Wanda, at times heartbreakingly human, at others coldly technological.

In his 1940 gloss, Masnata described *Wanda* as "a libretto that could not be realized either in the theater or on the screen. Simple, but very important. The listener of a radio-specific work absolutely should not experience any longing for the missing or invisible scenery. He should not say, 'What a shame! We can't see anything! It would be better to see the

[33] "Un'opera lirica per la Radio", *Radiocorriere,* Oct. 17–24, 1931, 5.

action.' Rather, he should call out: 'Just as well! We can't see a thing. This is the only way to get the maximum enjoyment and greatest effect from the work.'... Without a doubt, it is very challenging to discover plots that cannot be produced as theater or cinema or narration; but they can be found. You'll see."[34] Despite the helpful narration of the character known as *Voce*, the drama of *Wanda* left much to the listener's imagination. Listeners may have wondered where Wanda went, how she had managed to separate herself from her heart, and in what form she left her vital organ with Mario. They likely winced as they pictured the heart's blood spilling over the spinning record player and the violence of the needle carving grooves into muscle.

While Masnata's libretto left such images to the listener's imagination, musical motives introduced during the orchestral prelude return at key dramatic moments to illustrate the action. The most easily identifiable and most powerful of these is a musical figure that I call "the heartbeat motive," introduced during the heart's initial dialogue with Mario (see fig. 2.1). Flattened, the heart transforms into an object of modern technology, a record, which Mario will force to sound by playing it on a record player. The organ's compaction is accompanied by a laborious eighth-note triplet motive in the cellos and double bass—this heartbeat motive lasts fourteen uninterrupted measures. It continues under the narrative voice's description of the scene: "[Your tears] turned [the heart] into a phonograph record. They are extracting all of its harmonies. They are squeezing all of its secrets." As the moment of transformation nears, a change in tempo (marked allargando in the score) lengthens the silence between heartbeats, reminding listeners that Wanda's heart will imminently cease to beat. Once the metamorphosis is complete, the low strings fall silent, their mimetic heartbeat replaced by pointillistic interjections in the winds and violins. The sound is a vivid illustration of the diegetic presence of the heart beating in Mario's hands; its end marks the heart's transition from human organ to recording technology. A dramatic move that may have been difficult to portray on the stage proved simple for the "blind medium." Still, the diegetic sound of Wanda's beating heart might have inspired listeners to consider the unique and almost mystical powers of the medium to penetrate and amplify

[34] Masnata, *La Radia*, 82. The libretto sought to take advantage of radio's "blindness," thereby participating in a trend among radio plays and operas of the 1920s. Such works had to compensate for the lack of image in radio, for example by setting the action in a dark coal mine, as in Richard Hughes' 1925 radio play *Danger*.

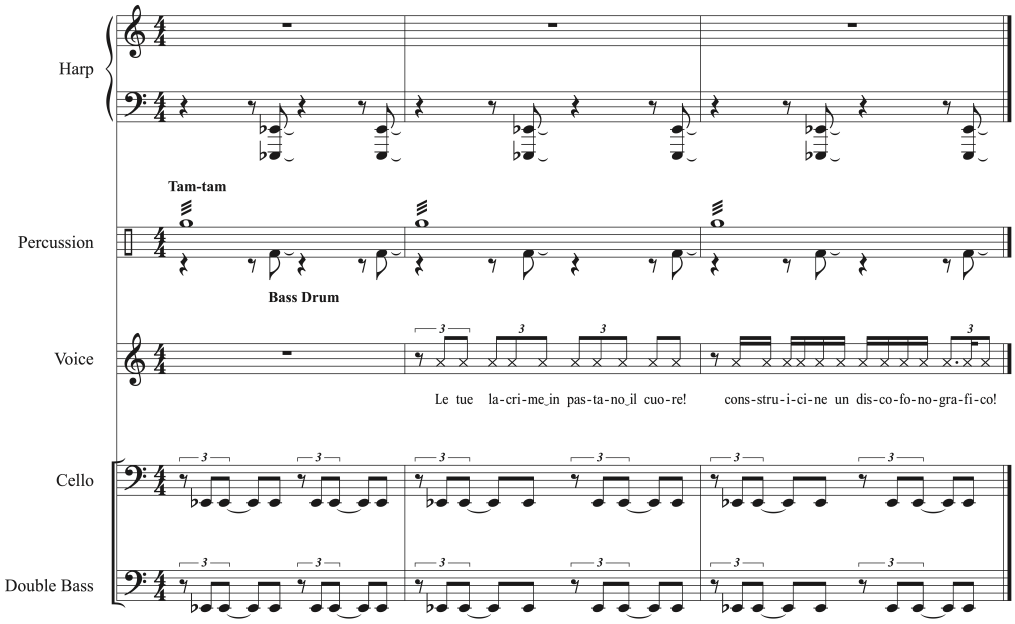

Figure 2.1: The Heartbeat Motive from *Il cuore di Wanda*

even the quietest sounds of the human body. As the tempo slowed and silences lengthened, the intrusion of radio static may have served as a reminder of the mechanism at work.

If Quarelli's broadcast transformed listeners into physicians merely by giving them access to a privileged body of sounds, the heart in *Il cuore di Wanda* also offered listeners access to something new: the seemingly impossible voice of a singing heart. *Il cuore di Wanda* is short, lasting barely fifteen minutes during the first performance, and is dominated by the aria "Tum tum ninna-nanna," sung by the flattened heart spinning on the record player. Characterized by a steady eighth-note pulse and a serpentine vocal line outlining a minor seventh chord, the aria repeats twice with only slight musical variations, as though the heart, once crushed, is unable to produce new material, just as a record can only play what is inscribed in its grooves.

Despite its brevity, *Il cuore di Wanda* ends in a dramatic finale that embroils it in the long history of Italian operatic deaths. An orchestral tremolo representing the peal of a telephone interrupts Mario's repentant cry following the heart's aria. It is Wanda, calling to thank Mario for crushing her heart and inform him that she is leaving him for another man. Wanda's final triumphant cry—"How beautiful is life! How wonderful is love without

a heart! I am covered in jewels!"—culminates in a high F#, punctuated less than a bar later by an F# minor chord played by the full orchestra (see fig. 2.2). This marks the first moment in the opera where the entire ensemble of 11 wind instruments, 13 brass players, harp, percussion and a full complement of strings plays together. Listeners may also note the finale's tritone movement away from the opera's first cadence in C minor. Perhaps the strangest aspect of the opera's finale is Guarino's idiosyncratic changes from 5/4 to ¾ to 2/4, each meter lasting barely a measure before changing again. These metric changes create an ecstatic rush to the finish, one infused with the futurist passion for speed and locomotion. Wanda achieves an apotheosis worthy of any Salome or Suor Angelica, but without the imminent death. She is the very embodiment of radio theater, in that she and her heart sing with voices whose very existence is made possible by the medium. Both Wanda and her heart represent intimate, impossible voices made accessible through radio: on the one hand, the heart; and on the other, the woman without one. Although doubly mediated, Wanda's voice inhabits the same diegetic space as that of the heart—to radio audiences, the two characters would have sounded identical from beginning to end.[35] Perhaps Wanda, once freed from her heart, dissolves into the ether and becomes only a voice, carried on waves, to be picked up by a radio receiver.

Just as the X-ray made it possible to peer into bodies, perceiving what had never been perceivable, radio made possible the perception and amplification of the sounds at the heart of the human body. This capacity opened up an array of aesthetic possibilities for the futurists, whose fascination with awakening the senses merged with their collective interest in transforming bodies, hearts, and minds into technologies. While Marinetti's 1909 "Futurist Manifesto" envisioned the creation of an "inhuman and mechanical" creature "constructed for omnipresent velocity," works like *Il cuore di Wanda* reveal a different side of the futurist imaginary: the radiophonic human, endowed with supersensory abilities and transformed, not into a tank or an airplane, but into a signal transmitted over an electromagnetic wave.

[35] For the original broadcast on December 29, 1931, both Wanda and her heart were sung by soprano Giuseppina Baldassare Tedeschi.

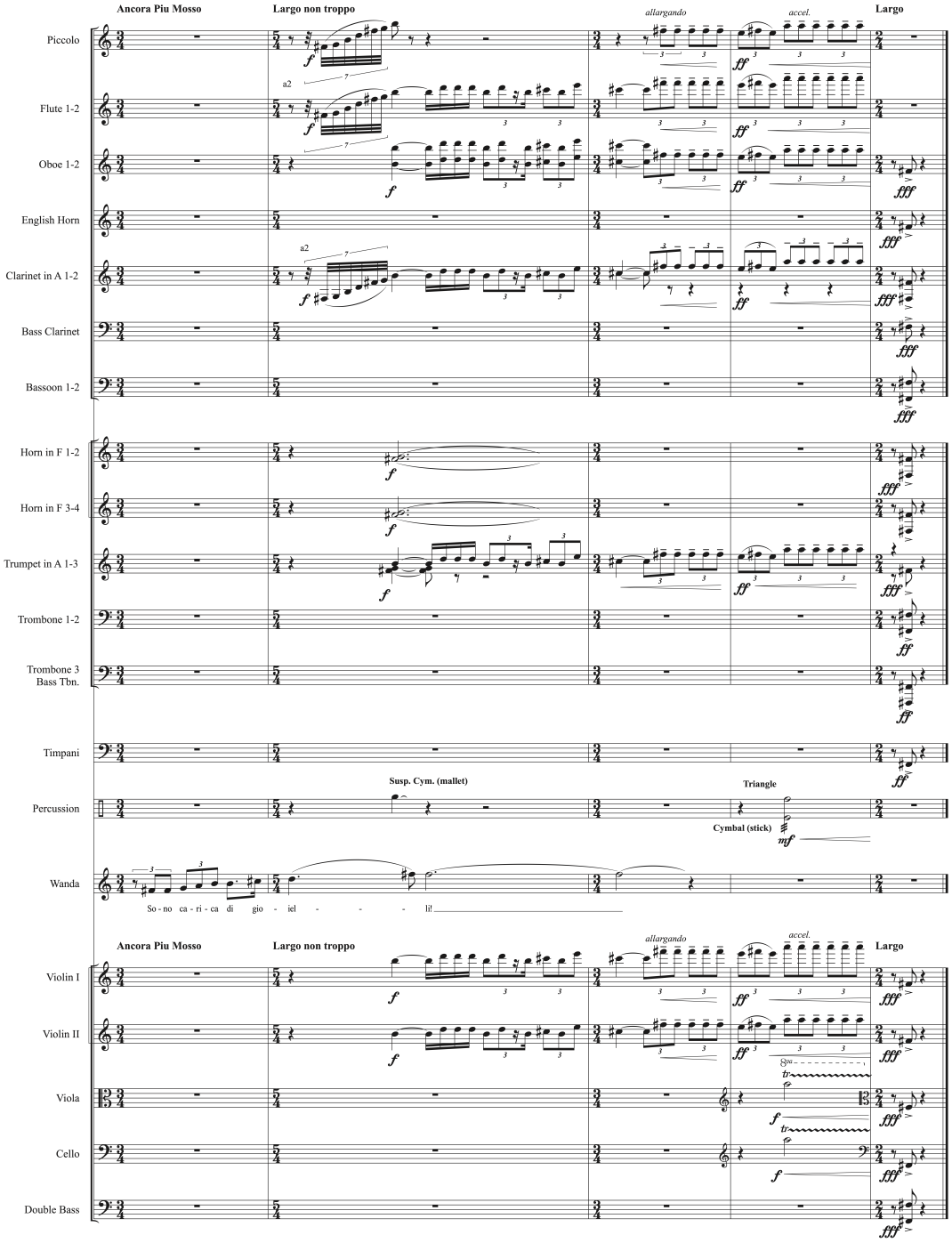

Figure 2.2: Wanda's apotheosis from *Il cuore di Wanda*

Radiophonic Spirits

The "Futurist Radio Manifesto" called as much for the "interception, amplification and transfiguration" of existing waves as for the creation of new sounds.[36] Among the most desirable signals, the manifesto named vibrations emitted by living beings, dead spirits, and matter (specific examples include diamonds and flowers), as well as transmissions and interference from other radio stations, and lights and voices from the past. Capturing such signals would free *la radia*, the new art for the radio, from the constraints of time ("picking up and amplifying with thermionic tubes lights and voices from the past will destroy time") and space ("the scene no longer visible or frameable now becomes universal and cosmic").[37] Masnata described the process of writing the manifesto with Marinetti as the result of a preternatural transformation: "When we wrote this Manifesto, we were on Lago di Garda in the park of a hospitable villa. Innumerable blue waves were swept to the foot of [Mt.] Altissimo, smashing into the rocks on which we found ourselves. We felt like two active thermionic valves highly sensitized to the waves coming from the infinite. We trust we snatched from nature another of its many secrets of beauty and of art."[38] Like Beethoven in Masnata's *radio sintesi*, the two poets underwent a physical transformation in order to access the previously unseen and unheard waves that permeated their surroundings, one that signaled their artistic genius. The thermionic valve served as a powerful agent in nearly all of Masnata's writings on radio. These vacuum tubes capable of controlling the flow of electrons were crucial to the development of radio technologies, but the futurist envisioned other possible uses. Masnata argued that the valves had the potential to transform not only human listening practices, but also the human body. "Can we deny," he wrote, "that the thermionic valves have immeasurably increased the field of our sensitivity ever since an Italian (thank goodness for this) scientist managed to receive the vibrations of a brain as differing graphic signs according to the different thought issuing from the brain itself?"[39] Masnata's

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[36] Marinetti and Masnata, "The Radia: Futurist Manifesto," in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 294.

[37] Marinetti and Masnata, "The Radia: Futurist Manifesto," in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 294.

[38] Fisher, "'The Art of Radia'," 169.

[39] Although it may seem fantastical to contemporary readers, Masnata's question gestured to actual scientific studies, including research by Professor Ferdinando Cazzamalli of Turin, who in the 1920s claimed to have measured high frequency

Beethoven chose deafness rather than accepting interference between the music received by his "thermionic valve" and the sound waves received by his ears. Masnata and Marinetti did not have to choose, instead sensitizing their minds to the waves, past and present, which reverberated through the universe. Furthermore, the transformation of the body into a thermionic valve was a process that went beyond mere theoretical or spiritual modification; it opened up the body to an archive of vital spirits circulating in the audible ether.

The "Futurist Radio Manifesto" called for the "metallicization of the human body," as a step towards "overcom[ing] death… and picking up the vital spirit as a mechanical force."[40] The original Italian used the term "captazione," here translated as "picking up": the same word used to describe the reception of radio waves. The notion of metallizing the human body was thus intimately related to capturing a wave, whether in the form of sound or radio. The possibility of capturing a human spirit as one could receive radio waves similarly emerged in Masnata's writings, stemming from the belief that while sound and light waves weaken over long distances, they never disappear. "People will be surprised," Masnata claimed, "that the [Radio] Manifesto speaks of tapping light and voices of the past. Yet, this was Edison's dream, and he devoted the last years of his life to it. He began with the concept that nothing is lost: the ray that illuminated Napoleon and was reflected still endures: one only needs to track it! The voice of Julius Caesar gave rise to a vibration that, in a very attenuated state, is still with us."[41] Sound produced in the past still exists, he argued, awaiting the invention of equipment sensitive enough to hear it.

The notion that the "vital spirit" could be captured in the form of waves reflected the movement's desire to linger after death not as purely mechanical objects but also as electromagnetic vibrations. During a special session at the Second Futurist Congress in 1933 (the same meeting at which

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waves produced by a brain under stress—the first steps toward facilitating telepathic communication. In 1946, Cazzamalli would go on to found the Associazione Italiana Scientifica di Metapsichica (Italian Association for the Scientific Study of Metapsychics), which to this day continues to fund and promote research into paranormal phenomena and ESP. "Marinetti e la Radio futura," *Corriere della sera* (December 15, 1933). Translation in Fisher, "The Art of Radia," 157.

[40] Marinetti and Masnata, "The Radia: Futurist Manifesto," in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 292.

[41] Fisher, "The Art of Radia," 167.

Masnata was named National Champion Poet) prominent futurists debated the question of the futurist *al di là*, or afterlife. The *Corriere della sera* reported on a proposal by Renato di Busso, in which the body of the deceased would be subjected to a metallization process in a crucible, then forged into a machine: "The man, having become a 'machine trope,' continues on with his life forever. The proposal… foreseeing the intervention of a phonographic device to collect the last wishes of the deceased, provoked a very lively discussion. The poet-surgeon Masnata observed that the human organism contains just as much metal as would be needed to make a very fine needle."[42] While the Second Futurist Congress has sparked the imagination of historians with the literalism of its efforts to metallize the human, it is impossible to overlook the first element mentioned in di Busso's proposal above, which suggested recording the last wishes of the deceased using a phonographic device. I would argue, however, that this was a crucial step in capturing the "vital spirit as a mechanical force" in the form of sound waves. Once the body was melted and forged into a new, mechanical form, the recording would remain the last, lingering, perpetually resonant spirit, preserved eternally on a record, to be replayed and rebroadcast at will.

The possibility of electrifying the soul would seem to be at odds with futurism's earlier obsession with the massive, and undeniably present, technologies of war: guns, tanks, and trucks.[43] Yet in 1931, the same year as *Il cuore di Wanda* and three years before the famous (and infamous) futurist production *18BL*, Marinetti imagined the transformation of a female body, not into machine, but into electromagnetic energy. Titled "Miss Radio," the short story was published ten years later in the collection *Novelle colle labbre tinte*. In the story, the protagonist Aldo and his brother Luciano travel across the sea while Aldo pines after his former lover, Millina, who has betrayed him. Millina is known to Aldo as "Miss Radio," since she once promised him that electromagnetic waves would connect the lovers forever. Her prophecy is fulfilled when Aldo hears Millina's voice emanating from the ship's electric fan and radio. He sees her form in the steam of the ship, which calls to him: "You'll find me everywhere! Even in the sky!"[44] Luciano (and the reader) suspect that these visitations are symptoms of Aldo's descent into madness;

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[42] "L'omaggio dei futuristi al Duce," *Corriere della sera,* June 16, 1933.
[43] See Jeffrey Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996).
[44] "Mi troverai dovunque! Anche in cielo!" See F.T. Marinetti, "Miss Radio" in *Novelle colle labbre tinte* (Milan: Mondadori, 1930), 68.

but Aldo's sanity is confirmed when, in the story's final pages, the ship's first mate also hears Millina's voice emanating from the radio operator's cabin, just moments before the ship sinks into the sea. Marinetti powerfully lodges Millina's electromagnetically charged voice in not one, but two bodies. She appears as coextensive with the ship's radio operator, for whom she speaks; but at the same time her voice seems to be contained within the physical mechanism of radio itself.

Another possible avenue for reconciling the futurist drive toward the metallization of man with the movement's interest in radio waves and the electromagnetic spectrum may lie in futurist *aeropittura*, which by 1929 sought to depict the final detachment of the metallized mind from the body.[45] In Benedetta Cappa Marinetti's work, for example, the mystical was regularly linked with the technological, as in the 1934 mural titled "Synthesis of Radio Communications."[46] In it, a radio tower dominates the image with a blue-tinted earth hovering behind it, half-circles in varying shades of blue emerging from either side of the silver scaffolding. Like other futurist *aeropittura*, the painting takes a bird's-eye view of the abstract scene, portraying the full length of the radio tower as if seen from a long distance. The lines of swirling color that fill the space around the radio tower are curved and ordered, a clear visual reference to the movement of waves emanating from a central source. Christine Poggi has argued that the hierarchical regularity of Benedetta's work—a far cry from the swirling chaos of signals pictured by Masnata—represents a fusion of the new futurist spirit and the unbendable order of the fascist state. For futurists like Benedetta "fulfillment of the desire for social happiness and spiritual transcendence could never be convincingly pictured in the present; instead, it was projected into the future and took the form of mystical faith."[47] If the spiritual turn in

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[45] Futurist *aeropittura* paintings spoke to the contemporary craze for aviation culture, fed by fascist propaganda, photography, radio broadcasts and newsreels. These representations portrayed daring pilots as the fascist new man, resilient, powerful, and largely without visible human bodies. Emily Braun, "Making Waves: Giacomo Balla and Emilio Pucci," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 67–82.

[46] Taking as their subject the technological advances in communications attributed to the regime during the fascist *ventennio*, the murals, collectively titled "Synthesis of Communications," depict air, radio, sea, land, telegraph and telephone communications amid swirling, primordial waves of color.

[47] Poggi, *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 281.

the futurist imaginary took over when the project of metallizing the human seemed at risk of failure, I would argue that it was a turn that emerged from radio. The wireless human was not a mere replacement for the mechanical man, but rather a new creature in himself, one inspired by real technologies and popular knowledge as well as by the mystical imaginings of futurist poets.

Fascism, Futurism and Ethereal Women

The relationship between the futurist movement and the fascist state has been the subject of scholarly debate for decades. "Even after National Socialist antimodernism and the Nazi aesthetic purges [from 1937 on] had influenced fascist cultural policy," Marla Stone has argued, "the futurists and Marinetti remained central players in state-sponsored culture."[48] Evidence suggests, however, that even at the regime's peak, the level of Mussolini and his government's regard for the avant-garde movement was up for discussion. Marinetti at times sought to play up the close ties of futurism to the regime, writing in the 1924 essay "Futurismo e fascismo": "Vittorio Veneto and the coming to power of Fascism constitute the realization of the minimum program of Futurism."[49] But the movement's political influence fluctuated over the years, with members including Marinetti himself regularly complaining of their lack of power and support.[50] Further, as Roger Griffin has shown, artists allied with early twentieth-century modernist movements like futurism produced a number of *anti*-fascist creative works.[51] Nevertheless, both futurists and fascists agreed on the need for a "total revolution"—the radical restructuring of the Italian state—and the indispensability of technology and machines to the new Italy. In 1934, Mussolini wrote that fascism had succeeded in controlling the machine,

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[48] Stone, *Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 52.
[49] Marinetti, "Futurismo e fascismo (1924)", in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 494.
[50] Marinetti argued that futurism had not received sufficient recognition at state-sponsored exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale. In the field of radio broadcasting, Marinetti and other consistently sought more airtime and felt themselves underrepresented; Fisher, "Futurism and Radio."
[51] Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

transforming it from a potential subjugator of man into an instrument of freedom and welfare.[52] The future of Italy, as envisioned by fascism, was a society in which man would recover his historic mastery over machines.

Certainly the two movements shared ideological undercurrents, although they took opposing stances on a number of issues, including the role of tradition and the state, the sanctity of the family, and religion.[53] During the *ventennio*, the regime's preoccupation with Mussolini's "project of making Italians" led to policy decisions designed to facilitate the creation of a fascist "new man." The regime's major supporters expounded the necessity of eliminating the perceived weaknesses and flaws in Italian genetics and creating a drastically new class of human to lead Italy into the modern era. They saw opponents to this process in homosexuals, feminists and anyone who questioned or subverted socially defined gender roles.[54] In many ways, the futurist political program was opposed to the nationalist agenda; although futurists argued that "the weaknesses of the race" had to be overcome so that Italians could "finally appear very virile, very new and very Italian," their political agenda would have granted women suffrage, abolished the institution of marriage, and legalized divorce.[55] The futurist fantasy of the metallized man was one freed from sensual needs, one "who merges himself with iron, is fed by electricity, and no longer understands anything except the sensual delight of danger and quotidian heroism."[56] Yet the artistic genius lauded by the futurists—like Masnata's Beethoven, one who shed his humanity to become one with technology and transform into a Nietzschean superman—bore a marked resemblance to the "new man" at the center of the

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[52] Benito Mussolini, "Dal discorso alla II Assemblea quinquennale" in *La gazzetta del popolo*, March 20, 1934.

[53] Emilio Gentile and Walter Adamson have shown that pre-war futurists and their avant-garde "modernist nationalism" provided the theoretical basis for the new aestheticization of politics. Gentile, *Mussolini e La Voce* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1976); and *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism.* (Westport: Praeger, 2003); Walter L. Adamson, "Modernism and Fascism: the Politics of Culture in Italy 1903–1922," *American Historical Review* 95 (1990), 395–390; and *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[54] Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012).

[55] Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man*, 22.

[56] Marinetti, "We Abjure Our Symbolist Masters, The Last Lovers of the Moon," in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 94.

fascist imaginary.

Alongside the trope of the metallic new man, the futurists developed concepts for a new, modern woman. The foundational manifesto of futurism famously claimed the movement's contempt for women.[57] The 1920 "Futurist Manifesto of Women's Fashion," however, claimed a place for women in the new metallized race: "In a woman we can idealize the most fascinating conquests of modern life. And so we will have the machine-gun woman… the radio-telegraph-antenna woman, the airplane woman, the submarine woman, the motorboat woman."[58] Certainly the female body caused ideological problems for the hypothetical future propounded by futurism, difficulties that shaped the futurist myth of autogenesis and the eroticization of machines.[59] But *Il cuore di Wanda* and *Miss Radio* offer clues as to one possible manifestation of the futuristic woman, one armed with the potential to escape both physical and ideological constraints. Both women dissolve into the ether, only to return as voices transmitted over the airwaves. Both relinquish their physical bodies in favor of an electromagnetic existence; and both describe this process as one that liberates them from the constraints of gender and romantic love. Millina of *Miss Radio* remains stubbornly sensual and dies when the mechanism responsible for receiving her voice—the ship's radio—sinks; but Wanda, freed from the constraints of her physical body, lives on as an electrified voice. Perhaps, in these radiophonic women, we find the seeds of a spirit beyond nationalist or even futurist agendas—a future woman, propelled through the air, living forever as an ethereal, electrified voice.

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[57] Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 51.

[58] Volt, "Futurist Manifesto of Women's Fashion," in Rainey, Poggi, and Wittman, eds., *Futurism*, 253.

[59] Futurism's famous obsession with speed, war and destruction participated in what Barbara Spackman has called a "rhetoric of fertility," in which women and their bodies came to represent the opposite of the masculine virtues the movement promoted. Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Chapter 3: Watching Radio

In January 1937, the Istituto LUCE, which produced newsreels and propaganda films for the regime as well as films and documentaries intended for the big screen, released a documentary into theaters that revealed the inner workings of Italian radio to its listeners. The first half of the fifteen-minute film focused exclusively on the technological side of broadcasting. Images of microphones, then of EIAR's transmitting towers in Turin, Milan, Trieste, Genoa, Florence, Bologna, Bolzano, and Rome, flashed by in quick succession, followed by the more esoteric broadcasting technologies, including Marconi-brand amplifying valves. Throughout, a narrating voice extolled the virtues of EIAR's newly-constructed station in Santa Palomba just outside Rome. After five minutes of dizzying mechanical display, the film shifted its focus inside the studio, where viewers were treated to another flurry of images, this time of EIAR performers, including: a performance of Alfredo Napolitano's operetta *Lo Shimmy Verde* by EIAR's Operetta Company; the overture to Giuseppe Verdi's *I vespri siciliani* performed by Maestro Marchesini's orchestra; scenes from the operas *Nabucco* and *Aida*, performed in EIAR's Rome and Turin theaters; and a scene from the popular radio-comedy *I quattro moschettieri.* This was not the first time LUCE cameras had infiltrated EIAR's studios. The radio network had already appeared in LUCE newsreels, projected throughout the nation onto film screens, the walls of barns, and even the sides of haystacks.[1] The 1937 documentary differed from these previous appearances, however, in small but crucial ways. For one thing, "Radio Italiana Anno XV," as the short documentary was titled, marked the first time EIAR studios and performers were the primary subjects of a LUCE documentary. More importantly, the 1937 documentary sought to fulfill a different purpose from earlier newsreels. Rather than serving as a single example among many of fascism's technological and cultural progress, the scenes in "Radio Italiana Anno XV"—as envisioned by EIAR executives—would "give the public as true, effective and complete a picture as possible of the life of Italian radio."[2]

The factors motivating this collaboration were at once commercial and political. In part, EIAR executives sought to gain new radio subscribers by emphasizing the network's cutting-edge technologies and the variety of

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[1] See Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158–164.
[2] *Radiocorriere,* December 6–12, 1936, 7.

its programmatic lineup. The film's title, "Radio Italiana Anno XV," referred not to the calendar year nor to the number of years since the beginning of national broadcasting, but rather to the year of the fascist calendar, which marked the passage of time since the 1922 March on Rome had raised Mussolini to power. The documentary explicitly tied EIAR's technological and artistic prowess to nationalist ideals, emphasizing the Italianness of both the radio transmitter (through repeated framing of the "Marconi Valve" logos) and the music and theater it broadcast. Every musical work, with the exception of Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, was by an Italian composer; every moment of drama and comedy by an Italian writer; every singer, actor, and musician a homegrown artist discovered, cultivated, and employed by EIAR. Moreover, the film claimed that, with the construction of the five towers in Prato Smeraldo, the words and music of Italian radio could be received as far away as North and South America, Africa, and East Asia.

The documentary built on the established practice of printing images of radio sets and stars already discussed in previous chapters. The images of EIAR performers flashing one after another onscreen created a sense of sheer visual and aural chaos—Nunzio Filogamo as Aramis, complete with a wide-brimmed hat and tabard, waving a rapier as he shouted, "uno per tutti, tutti per uno!"; the studio audience rejoicing as Radio Roma's opera chorus sang "Va pensiero" from *Nabucco*; Turin's massive radio orchestra framed in splendor in the Teatro Scribe, which the network had acquired six years earlier. The film also gave viewers a peek at the recording of the daily radio news program *Giornale Radio* and the device that created the "uccellino," the trilling bird sound that marked the beginning of each hour of radio programming. Thus the frenetic sequence offered its audience a glimpse behind the looking-glass of a blind medium—a sonic and, more importantly, *visual* encapsulation of a day in the life of the radio. The documentary promised viewers a sneak-peek into radio's daily life—a life characterized by variety and speed.

Variety is a term that has become nearly synonymous with radio broadcasting, but this has not always been the case. American radio stations were among the first to feature variety shows, often titled after their stars or their sponsors, as with *The Fleischmann's Yeast Hour with Rudy Vallee*, which many historians agree was the first program to signal radio's transformation into a variety medium. These shows drew on a number of artistic precedents in both live and mediated formats, incorporating elements including vaudeville sketches, nightclub acts, dramas with sound effects, and perhaps

most importantly, a star emcee.[3] In the United States, the rise of radio variety shows paralleled the increased commercialization of the medium. Advertisers invested more money in radio, and interrupting programming for advertising was no longer controversial. As part of this process the voice of the radio star became an object to be marketed, and corporations clamored to sponsor shows featuring a celebrity host.[4] The story was different for Italian radio. Until the early 1930s, EIAR's entertainment programming heavily emphasized comedic morality dramas and concerts of *musica leggera* over variety programs.[5] A few years later, however, the network's attitudes towards what had earlier been deemed "popular programming" shifted, and variety programming could be heard regularly on Italian airwaves.[6] Although the programs discussed in this chapter are, variously, live performances and radio broadcasts, films and advertising campaigns, they all began as radio variety.

Because the variety format allowed for swift movement between different modes of performance—among them stand-up comedy, dramatic storytelling, and musical performance—it facilitated producers' efforts to deal with the complex and often-contradictory commercial and political pressures put on a network that depended on both political goodwill and subscription fees to function. A variety show could relate the moral tale of a troupe of fascist Balilla youth saving a young toddler, and in the very next scene play a popular love song to recapture listener's straying attention. Moreover, variety shows offered Italian radio a new avenue for commercial gain beyond licensing fees because they were uniquely attractive to corporate sponsors.[7] The same period that saw a rise in variety programs on EIAR

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[3] See Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[4] For more on the rise of radio and television celebrities in the United States, see Susan Murray, *Hitch Your Antenna to the Stars: Early Television and Broadcast Stardom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 6.

[5] Gianni Isola, *Abbassa la tua radio, per favore… Storia dell'ascolto radiofonico nell'Italia fascista* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1999), 196.

[6] A brief survey of program listings shows a marked increase in musical variety shows beginning in 1933. Although a survey of radio subscribers in 1927 concluded that listeners wanted more classical music and cultural programming and less advertising and jazz music, by 1930 EIAR had begun regular broadcasts of "radiovarietà," which included light music and jazz as well as comedy performances: Isola, 85.

[7] David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from*

stations also witnessed burgeoning interest in collaborations between EIAR and other Italian industries.[8] Each of the cases this chapter considers is an example of these collaborative practices, which frequently resulted in the simultaneous presentation of live and mediated performances. The contemporaneity of the live and the mediated, which became a convention of these cross-medial collaborations in the 1930s, resulted in a regular blurring of the line between reality and fiction. Which was the "real" musketeer, the one whose voice echoed around the nation from radio receivers, or whose face was visible as he descended to earth in a hot air balloon?

This chapter traces the transformation of Italian radio from a blind into a sighted medium, one produced as much by visual spectacle as by live, synchronized sound. Toward the end of the 1930s, as fascism sought global influence through both colonial and commercial ventures, the Italian radio network became increasingly geared towards commercial advertising and collecting profits. EIAR's commercial aims were not antithetical to its political responsibilities, and the network labored in concert with governmental edicts to promote local products and local talent. In this chapter, I examine two major multimedia projects undertaken by EIAR in the 1930s: the first major multimedia collaboration between the network and a commercial entity, the serial radio musical *I quattro moschettieri*, sponsored by the chocolatier Perugina; and EIAR's first and only full-length feature film, *Ecco la radio!* These experiments were unprecedented attempts to integrate the network's pursuit of commercial gain with its political ambitions, and I argue that they also represented efforts to reconceptualize radio as an intermedial platform that could incorporate live performance and images as well as sounds.

Music, Money, and Mayhem: the Case of *I quattro moschettieri*

Nell'istoria che andiamo a narrare,

Fascism to the Cold War (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 173–176.

[8] For a detailed exploration of intersections between the publishing and radio industries, see Gianni Isola, *L'ha scritto la radio: storia e testi della radio durante il fascismo: 1924–1944* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998). On intersections between the film and radio industries, and particularly on the reappearance of star film actors on the radio, see Alessandro Faccioli, *Leggeri come in una gabbia: L'idea comica nel cinema italiano (1930–1944)* (Turin: Edizioni Kaplan, 2014).

Si vedranno cappelli piumati,
Spade, guanti, duelli ed agguati,
Belle donne e consegni d'amor.

Gia Dumasse narrò quest'istoria,
Che in un secondo è molto mutata.
Se per radio l'avete gustata,
Nel romanzo leggetela ancor.

[In the story we are going to tell,
You will see feathered hats,
Swords, gloves, duels and ambushes,
Beautiful women and declarations of love.

Dumas has already told it.
The story which, in retelling, is greatly altered.
If you enjoyed it over radio,
In the novel you may read it again.]

The poem above appeared on the title page of the 1936 book *I quattro moschettieri.* Published by the food distribution companies Buitoni and Perugina, *I quattro moschettieri* followed the adventures of the four Musketeers—Porthos, Athos, Aramis and D'Artagnan—originally from Alexandre Dumas's 1844 novel *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, but popularized in EIAR's regularly-occurring radio comedy series.[9] The book's four musketeers left Paris's elegant streets for adventures in Ethiopia, Japan, Mexico, the Wild West, and Hollywood, meeting such august characters as Catherine of Aragon, Ulysses, Othello, Clark Gable, and the comedians Laurel and Hardy, among others. In this, the book followed the general contours of the narrative already set by the radio show, which had been among EIAR's most popular offerings. A riotous comedy complete with parodies of popular songs

[9] While the relationship between print publications and the radio industry during fascism is outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth recognizing that *I quattro moschettieri* is only one of a number of publications that circulated information about radio characters, music and celebrities. Notable among these publications are *Radiocorriere*, of course, but also *Il canzoniere della radio*, which from 1940 on printed lyrics of popular Italian jazz songs that played regularly on the radio, as well as photos and interviews with radio celebrities. See Anna Celenza, *Jazz Italian Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 38.

and celebrity figures, the program was the source of a bewildering array of multimedia spin-offs, including a 1936 film, two illustrated volumes, and a myriad of playing cards, figurines, and public spectacles meant to advertise the program and its sponsor. After an underwhelming start, the show became the network's first major "hit" following a move from Thursday to Sunday afternoons.[10] The success of *I quattro moschettieri* following its premiere on October 18, 1934 was both new and entirely expected—Buitoni-Perugina had already sponsored several recurring concert series featuring popular radio voices. What was unique about *I quattro moschettieri* was the scale of the sponsorship and the ways it manifested in media formats beyond the airwaves.

The parodic antics of *I quattro moschettieri* may not have represented an aesthetic novelty, building as they did on nearly a decade of radiophonic *varietà*. The program was, however, distinguished both by its level of popularity and by the commercial pageantry it inspired. EIAR executives attributed the massive increase in listener subscriptions—from 535,000 in 1934 to 900,000 in spring 1937—to the musketeers' popularity. In an unprecedented case of co-ordination between cultural industries, all soccer matches were delayed by half an hour so fans could finish listening to *I quattro moschettieri* before they tuned in to support their favorite teams.[11] The corporate sponsors launched a massive advertising campaign to capitalize on the show's popularity. Listeners could find illustrated cards picturing the show's characters in packages of Perugina chocolates, and collecting these *figurine* became a mania among both children and adults. A complete set of *figurine*, along with proof-of-purchase stamps, could be exchanged for prizes including Perugina chocolates, radio sets, and even a Fiat Balilla. The competition to collect a complete set led to a robust trading market for the toys, replete with counterfeits and stolen merchandise. In 1938, the Ministry of Finance issued a decree prohibiting advertising programs of this kind, including contests, except within strictly controlled parameters. The rhetoric of the decree was paternalistic, arguing that the government should protect its citizens from disingenuous money-making

[10] The most in-depth analysis of the complete series to date can be found in A. De Lazzari, *L'intrattenimento radiofonico in Italia: il cast de 'I quattro moschettieri' di Nizza e Morbelli* (PhD thesis, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Università del S. Cuore di Milano, 1998).

[11] Multiple sources corroborate this claim; see for example Fausto Colombo, *L'Industria Culturale Italiana Dal 1900 alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Milan: EDUCatt, 2007).

schemes, and that such contests distracted from the "traditional" and "artisanal" value of the chocolates. In reality, the decree was likely motivated by the threat that such contests represented to the state lottery.[12]

When *I quattro moschettieri* launched in 1934, the regime still attracted broad consensus and high levels of support among its base. EIAR, too, was experiencing a golden age a decade after its initial broadcasts—only the year before, the network had established year-round, nationwide broadcasting by enabling its transmitters to run without ceasing.[13] The construction of the new towers in Prato Smeraldo, completed in 1934, meant that EIAR broadcasts could be transmitted directly via short-wave to North America, where they could then be relayed to East Asia.[14] With a growing audience and demanding shareholders to please, EIAR executives felt pressure to develop programs "always more popular and with greater variety." This was a difficult proposition, as EIAR president Giancarlo Vallauri assured shareholders, "due to the scarcity of works that have not already been performed… and a lack of new ideas for radio as well as in other entertainment fields from which radio draws its own material for transmission… The search for new material that can be appreciated by listeners is our greatest concern… If the results sometimes are not equivalent to the efforts we have made, this is due partly to the difficulties mentioned above and partly to the fact that what today constitutes a great success on our part easily becomes a object of criticism tomorrow."[15] The rather apologetic tenor of Vellauri's statement, printed in the network's annual report to its shareholders, was likely the result of criticism that EIAR had spent too much airtime rebroadcasting transmissions from the radio stations of other (mostly European) countries, rather than producing its own content. The pressure—both financial and political—to create new, decisively Italian content increased as the network's subscriber list grew.

Enter Angelo Nizza and Riccardo Morbelli. Both writers had already composed successful serial radio programs. Along with EIAR composer and conductor Egidio Storaci, they had previously collaborated on *Le avventure di Topolino*, a program based on the character of Mickey Mouse that had

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[12] The 1930s saw a number of conflicts between commercial advertising schemes and the increasingly conservative policies of the regime. See Karen Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising Under Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 19.

[13] EIAR, *Relazioni esercizio 1933*.

[14] EIAR, *Relazioni esercizio 1934*.

[15] EIAR, *Relazioni esercizio1934*.

received particular attention for its innovative use of special effects to distinguish individual characters. Nizza and Morbelli based the show's characters on Alexandre Dumas's 1844 novel *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, although the plot of the show would drastically diverge from the source. Over the three years of transmission, the main characters Aramis, Athos, Porthos and D'Artagnan would find themselves searching for a diamond-encrusted shoe in a sultan's court, attempting to circumnavigate the globe in a hot air balloon, and rubbing elbows with Cleopatra, Louis XVI, and stars of the Hollywood screen. Their radiophonic adventures were immortalized in the publication of two books by Buitoni-Perugina, the first of which, *I quattro moschettieri*, chronicled the broadcast's first two seasons (1934-1935), while the second, *Due anni dopo*, revisited the plots of the final year (1936-1937). The show combined a variety-show structure, with each episode featuring parodies of popular songs sung by the four musketeers, with a long form narrative similar to that of a serial novel (an example of which was, of course the source novel).[16] *I quattro moschettieri* was, as I have indicated, a multimedia endeavor "bridging" both classic literature and modern technologies. The anachronistic co-presence of characters from the ancient and modern world was echoed in the contemporaneous release of the narrative over multiple media platforms.

The drama of *I quattro moschettieri* blurred the lines between reality and fiction. In one particularly striking example, the musketeers—fleeing from a crowd of fans in modern-day Paris—find a safe haven in the shop of a writer, one "Maison Dumas & C.ie".[17] The novelist had been referenced throughout the first season of the transmission as "il padre Dumasse," a sly quip at the autarchical practice of "italianizing" [italianizzazione] the names of foreign artists.[18] (Famous examples include "Luigi Bracciaforte" for Louis Armstrong and "Beniamino Buonuomo" for Benny Goodman. Although these names did not appear in advertisements or record labels, they were likely were used during EIAR broadcasts, particularly during the years leading up to World War II.) The author greets the musketeers

[16] Rodolfo Sacchettini has argued convincingly that the broadcast self-consciously paid homage to the source novel even as it constructed a new kind of narrative space. See Rodolfo Sacchettini, *Scrittori alla radio: interventi, riviste e radiodrammi per un'arte invisibile* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2018).
[17] Sacchetini's reading of this scene emphasizes the conflict between art and commerce: "It is literature itself that is the victim of a sometimes cynical desecration, in which everything seems to depend on the rules of money." Ibid, 41.
[18] Celenza, *Jazz Italian Style*, 167.

affectionately, "Is that you four? I've been expecting you! I have just won the copyright to my novels. The *Three Musketeers* is a stale book, but it still sells. You owe me, my sons."[19] Dumas's words frame the fictional encounter as not only a meeting between characters, but between radio and print. The author's welcome sets up the relationship between the two media as one not of confrontation but of obligation. Because of its immense popularity, Dumas claims, the radio show revived his novel, transforming it from a "stale" book into a publication that was commercially viable.

The parody offered a contrast to discourse among politicians and writers that pitted radio against print media. The publishing industry in Italy had seen a marked transformation from small publishing houses producing high-quality editions of classic literary works to an industrial model printing popular novels for the masses, changes that paralleled those happening in other Western countries.[20] These popular novels targeted a middle-class readership, largely female, which also represented a significant portion of the audience for other popular media like cinema and radio.[21] The crisis was framed in part as a problem of foreign influence: "There is much talk of a crisis in Italian books, not so much these days because of poor sales, but because of the lack of works, especially of popular literature, that can keep pace with foreign works of this genre."[22] For both fascist and anti-fascist thinkers, the growing popularity of radio and cinema threatened to

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[19] Nizza and Morbelli, *I quattro moschettieri* (Perugia: Perugina Buitoni Edizione, 1936), 127

[20] For more on the print industry during fascism, see Nicola Tranfaglia and Albertina Vittoria, *Storia degli editori italiani: dall'unità alla fine degli anni Sessanta* (Rome: Editori Laterza, 2007); and Christopher Rundle, *Publishing Translations in Fascist Italy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

[21] Marcia Landy has argued that "white telephone" films—so named because of the white telephone often pictured in the frame, a marker of the bourgeois urban upper class—confronted the increasingly central role of media in modern life and the importance of performance in a mediatized world. These films were largely marketed toward a new population of women consumers. Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus: Theatricality in the Italian Cinema, 1930–1943* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998).

[22] Franco Ciarlantini, "Il problema della razza e l'autarchia spirituale," *Giornale della libreria* 51 (1938), 253–254. Translated in Christopher Rundle, "Stemming the Flood: The Censorship of Translated Popular Fiction in Fascist Italy," *Perspectives* 26. no. 6 (2018): 841.

exacerbate this lack of a "national" Italian literature.[23] Yet others echoed the fictional Dumas's optimistic belief that radio could rescue the struggling print industry. In 1937, in response to the "book crisis," Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of Education, argued: "We should address the readership and consider its social composition; and ask ourselves whether the relationship between books and readers has not changed so much that new approaches have to be found, different to those that we have considered valid until now… The book is no longer the cultural reference point of our society… It is not by denigrating the impact of radio and cinema that we can save the book. Quite the contrary. We must cultivate the intellectual stimulation that radio, cinema and even sport undoubtedly provoke in the people like a young bud that can then flower into a profound awareness of the importance of books as the crowning achievement of their moral and intellectual growth. Only when books seem the ideal conclusion, to be approached not against but through the other cultural channels, will the book crisis come to an end."[24] In Bottai's framing, the solution to the purported crisis was to muster every available medium to promote literature, without abandoning the possibility of improving the reading habits (and through them the moral and intellectual character) of the people.

Immediately after the Musketeers enter Dumas's shop, the novelist introduces himself with a "canzonetta pubblicitaria" (or advertising song) entitled "La Maison Dumas & C." A variety show staple, the parody song was a familiar genre to listeners of *I quattro moschettieri*. Each episode featured several such songs, sung either to newly-composed music by Storaci or to the strains of popular tunes heard on the radio.[25] The source for "La Maison

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[23] In his notes on fascism and popular culture, Antonio Gramsci tended explicitly to privilege literary works over radio and film, even though the latter were becoming increasingly important in the 1930s. He lamented, "If the Italian newspapers of 1930 want to increase (or maintain) their circulation, why must they publish serial novels of a hundred years ago (or modern ones of the same kind)? Why is there no 'national' literature of this type in Italy, even though it must be profitable?" *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 366.

[24] Giuseppe Bottai, "Il libro e la cultura del popolo," *Critica fascista,* July 1, 1937; translated in Rundle, "Stemming the Flood," 845.

[25] Linda Hutcheon has defined parody as "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity"; see her "The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History," *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986), 185–186. See also Stephen Gundle, "Laughter Under Fascism: Humour and Ridicule in

Dumas & C." was a popular song released only a few years before, "Tutto quel che fa papà" by Vittorio Mascheroni. The song, which had been recorded multiple times since its release in 1931, caricatured the modern reversal of traditional gender roles:

> Tutto al mondo si è modernizzato,
> Tuttè cambiato
> Senza eccezion.
> Ma la moda ha un poco esagerato,
> Ha rovesciato certe mansion.
> Pur se a tante cose non badiamo
> Noi ne vediamo… d'ogni color.
>
> *Ritornello*
> Tutto quel che fa Papà
> Non l'ha fatto mai Mammà.
> Ma quest'oggi tutti seguono il progresso
> E le donne van cambiando il loro sesso.
> Mentre a spasso va… Mamma,
> In cucina sta… Papà.
> Forse un giorno si vedrà
> Che il bambino di mamma
> Se lo allatterà… Papà.
>
> [Everything in the world is modernized,
> Everything has changed
> Without exception.
> But fashion has exaggerated a little.
> It has upset some roles.
> Even if we don't pay attention to many things,
> We notice them… in every color.
>
> *Chorus*
> Everything that Papa does
> Mama never did.

Italy, 1922–43," *History Workshop Journal* 79 (2015), 215–232."Laughter Under Fascism: Humour and Ridicule in Italy, 1922–43," *History Workshop Journal* 79, (2015): 215–232.

But today everyone is seeking progress
And women are changing their sex.
While Mamma goes walking,
Papa is in the kitchen.
Maybe one day we will see
That Mama's baby
Will be nursed by… Papa!]

The lyrics describe a "modernized" family in which the father, emasculated by his wife's leaving the home to seek amusement elsewhere, is forced to breastfeed his children himself. In its mockery of the "modern" woman—and, by extension, her husband—the song mirrored the ideological values espoused by fascism, which preached the inviolability of the nuclear family and the supremacy of the male.[26]

The contrafact sung by Dumas in the radio show does away with gender, instead concerning itself with the changing relationship among different media industries.

Una ditta seria s'è impiantata,
Viene chiamata
'MAISON DUMAS.'
Fabbrica romanzi e sensazione,
Su ordinazione,
In quantità.
Crea le novelle e i madrigali
Per gli sponsali
E i funeral.

Ritornello
Tutto quel che fa Dumas
Gli dà la celebrità.
O Alessandro, certo fu saggio consiglio
Di far fare lo scrittore anche a tuo figlio.
Sulle orme di papà
Scrive il figlio di Dumas:
Giunge alla celebrità,

[26] On gender roles during fascism, see Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Il piccino di papà,
Con la *Dame au camélias*.

De Musset e Balzac abbian pazienza
La concorrenza
Far non so può.
E tra il *Miserabili* rimanga
E triste pianga
Victor Hugo.
Preso ho il monopolio letterario.
Niun avversario
Mai temerò.[27]

[A serious, established company
Named MAISON DUMAS
Produces novels and sensations
Made to order,
In large quantities.

Everything Dumas does
Makes him a celebrity.
Oh Alexandre, surely it was wise advice
That made your son a writer as well.
The son Dumas follows
In his father's footsteps, writing:
Papa's little one becomes a celebrity himself
With his *Dame au camélias*.

Have patience with Musset and Balzac.
They cannot compete.
And Victor Hugo weeps over
Les Misérables.
I won the literary monopoly.
I will never fear
Any opponent.]

The comic lyrics distinguish between the French authors Hugo, Musset and

[27] Nizza and Morbelli, *I quattro moschettieri*, 127.

Balzac, whose works would have been among the main staples of the old Italian publishing industry, and Dumas and his son (Alexandre Dumas, fils), whose novel *La Dame au camélias* provided the source material for Giuseppe Verdi's opera *La traviata.* The distinction is one based on celebrity and commercial success, which Dumas and his son acquired, due in large part—the listeners are led to believe from the author's earlier lines—to the popularity of the radio show. This scene was just one of numerous intersections between the diegetic universe of *I quattro moschettieri* and the listener's reality. The characters frequently paid tribute to "Maestro Storaci," the orchestra conductor and musical collaborator who wrote several original songs for the series. This blurring of the boundaries between reality and fiction, and between character and studio, played on the very nature of radio broadcasting, which juxtaposed news and drama, music and sports with impunity. It is worth remembering that this was not a natural characteristic of the medium, but the result of a long process (discussed in Chapter 1) of attributing immediacy and liveness to broadcasting, thereby naturalizing the connection between the studio and the listener. Whether the broadcast was prerecorded, or the listener heard actors or newscasters, the sounds transmitted by their receiver were understood to be live, immediate recreations of the studio (or, in the case of on-location broadcasts, the microphone). The playful mixing of reality and fiction in *I quattro moschettieri* was the natural continuation of this process. After all, if radio could recreate the studio in a listener's home, why could it not create entirely new realities?

Shortly after Dumas's song, Cardinal Riciuliù (Richelieu) enters and shares with the musketeers his hopes for launching the career of a new author, one Jules Verne, whose book *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* has thus far failed to secure a publisher. After securing promises for payment in the form of castles and noble titles, the musketeers agree to take a voyage around the world in a hot air balloon to advertise Verne's novel.[28] The trip provides the action for the second series of transmissions, as the musketeers travel over Ethiopia (a nation which at the time was engaged in a violent conflict with invading Italian armies), Spain, and Siberia. In Argentina, the musketeers are surprised to discover, instead of cows and *gauchos*, a thriving fan base for a new sport called soccer; in Russia, they are shocked to discover they must pay for a ticket in order to attend a public execution at the Kremlin. Each episode, as has been noted by Rodolfo Sacchettini, "ends with

[28] Nizza and Morbelli, *I quattro moschettieri*, 128.

the discovery that behind the many veils of deception, what ultimately drives the engine, not only of certain events but of all that can be observed, is money."[29] However, to say that the show furthered a critique of capitalism, or even displayed the anti-Americanism that would later characterize fascism's international policy in the late 1930s, would be an exaggeration. Instead, *I quattro moschettieri* exemplified the tensions that lay at the heart of EIAR's pursuit of commercial profit and political clout.

Insofar as scholarship has considered *I quattro moschettieri*, the show has been framed as either "pure entertainment" or as thin veneer developed to cover the strictly commercial aims of the corporate sponsors.[30] While neither of these approaches are unjustified, they fail to take into account the ways in which *I quattro moschettieri* and its particular genre of performance—the radiophonic variety show—took on both the network's commercial and political (propagandistic) goals of the mid-1930s. Fascism's guiding economic model was corporatism, a system that, among other things, organized labor groups in relation to their particular sector of economic life, rather than by class, and established a corporative parliament to replace what had been the Chamber of Deputies.[31] Advocates, including Mussolini himself, revered corporatism not only as a new economic system, but also as a new system of values that extolled collective interests over personal ones, and the needs of the group over the individualist impulses that the regime viewed as central to the American capitalist model. Corporatism represented for its advocates both an economic and a spiritual "third way" between liberal democracy and Marxism. "The corporative revolution knows no compromises," as one idealist argued: "it touches

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[29] Sacchettini, *Scrittori alla radio:* 42.

[30] See, for example, Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society;* and Pinkus, *Bodily Regimes.*

[31] Although economic histories of the fascist period tend to focus on how the regime's policies contributed to the nation's "modernization" and ultimately to economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, fascism's corporatist model was inseparable from the regime's imperial ambitions. This was due to the lack of indigenous raw materials and energy resources and to a lackluster domestic market. But the Ministry of Corporations, like other branches of the fascist government, was hampered in its efforts to develop an economic system to rival capitalism by general inefficiency and a lack of enthusiasm and support from other government agencies. See Philip Morgan, "Corporatism and the Economic Order" in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. R. J. B. Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 150–166.

everything in our lives, transforming our way of thinking, our moral and social relationships as well as economic ones… No reformism, no reaction, just revolution. This is fascism."[32] With its focus on national wellbeing as opposed to consumption, advocates claimed that corporatism would combat what they saw as the materialist and individualist impulses of American capitalism.

Nevertheless, fascism's corporatist policies failed to prevent, and sometimes accelerated, changes to the structures of production and distribution as well as a rising consumerism, all of which seemed drawn directly from the American capitalist model. Corporatism functioned as a symbol of the revolutionary nature of fascism's antiliberal, antileftist brand of modernity; nevertheless, particularly for the radio industry, ideological and commercial concerns were not necessarily viewed as contradictory or mutually exclusive. This was, in part, the result of Radio Balilla and other efforts on the part of both EIAR and the regime to expand radio consumption—by the late 1930s, nearly one in five Italian households owned a radio receiver, compared with barely one in thirty the decade before. Although there is no doubt that these projects were politically motivated and intended to establish fascism's political base, especially outside of urban centers, such forces also supported EIAR's push for commercial gain through increases in subscription.[33] Moreover, radio consumption cannot be measured only via material purchasing of radio receivers, since, particularly in rural areas, educational and cultural programming was consumed outside of the home in schools and community centers. These social listeners represented not only a growing base of support for the fascist regime, but also a population with growing purchasing power and a heightened interest in material tokens of modern life.[34] *I quattro moschettieri* therefore, was the manifestation of a convergence of three commercial interests: the corporate sponsors, Perugina and Buitoni, EIAR, which sought to increase both its advertising revenue and paying subscriber base, and the regime.

In 1935, the voice actors who played the fictional characters burst into reality when Nunzio Filogamo (Aramis), Umberto Mozzato (Porthos), Aldo

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[32] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (University of California Press, 2001), 101.

[33] See Philip Cannistraro, "The Radio in Fascist Italy," *Journal of European Studies* 2 (1972), 127–54.

[34] For an explanation of changes to the advertising industry during the *ventennio*, see Adam Arvidsson, "Between Fascism and the American Dream: Advertising in Interwar Italy," *Social Science History* 25 (2001), 151–186.

Masseglia (Athos) and Dino de Luca (D'Artagnan) landed in a hot air balloon in the center of the *Fiera Campionaria di Milano* (Milan's annual trade fair). Costumed as their characters, the voice actors descended from the balloon into a throng composed of thousands of adoring fans.[35] Listeners were already familiar with the characters' appearances from drawings and publicity photos featuring the voice actors in their musketeer costumes, which had already graced the pages of *Radiocorriere*. Captions below the photos assured listeners that the transmission was performed "live, as live as can be! The photographs in costume have been included only to give more richness to the burlesque transmission."[36] The 1935 balloon landing, of course, was not the first or only occasion in which radio celebrities were made visually accessible to their listeners—we might think, for example, of the photos of opera singers in costume printed in *Radiocorriere*, discussed in Chapter 1. Yet the musketeers' appearance at the Milan fair differed in both scale and kind from these earlier attempts to embody radiophonic characters. Unlike the printed images, the publicity stunt was not meant to increase listenership for the already-popular show, or to provide the show's listeners with fodder for their imagination, but to promote sales of Buitoni-Perugina's *figurine*. The strategy of embodying radiophonic characters for fans, in the case of *I quattro moschettieri*, marked the network's concession to the commercial interests of its sponsors.

Radio Screens, Radio Voices

In the years after *I quattro moschettieri,* EIAR undertook a number of projects beyond the radio waves, producing films as well as live performances and touring productions. These projects offered the network opportunities for political and commercial gain beyond what was available through radio production. Beginning in 1938 and 1939, EIAR hosted a series of popular song competitions, open to Italian nationals between the ages of 16 and 40. The *gara della canzone*, as it was called, elicited entries from more than

[35] The exact number of spectators is difficult to gauge. Some sources estimate several thousand spectators, while others claim that at least a hundred thousand fans braved a torrential rainfall to see their heroes in person. See, for example, Fausto Columbo, *L'Industria Culturale Italiana dal 1900 alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Milan: I.S.U. Università Cattolica, 1997), 111.

[36] *Radiocorriere,* March 17–23, 1935, 7. The photos to which the editor referred were printed two weeks earlier, in *Radiocorriere,* March 3–9, 1935, 40.

2,000 singers in 1938, from whom 14 were selected to front EIAR's in-house jazz orchestras. The next year, EIAR received more than 3,000 entries.[37] The competition was a professional version of EIAR's *L'Ora del dilettante*, which from 1936 had showcased amateur musical and theatrical performers as they competed to win votes submitted via postcard by listeners at home. The attraction of *L'ora del dilettante* lay in the very ordinariness of the performers. A review in the newspaper *Il popolo d'Italia* described the contestants of the fifth *Ora del dilettante* as follows: "a messenger, a student, two or three housewives, a businessman, the wife of a glassmaker, a five-year-old girl, typists, various clerks, apprentices and specialized workers." Performers became heroes of their hometowns. When *Radiocorriere* failed to print the photo of one Giovanni Turchetti from Ancona, several of his fellow countrymen submitted photos on his behalf to the magazine.[38] Although EIAR's *gara della canzone* was geared towards "discovering" professionals rather than amateurs, competitors were similarly linked with their cities of origin. Advertisements proudly displayed each winner in the pages of *Radiocorriere* alongside an image of their hometown.[39]

The competitions followed a format that will be familiar to readers, one similar to contemporary competitions such as *American Idol*. After a series of preliminary elimination events took place in theaters throughout the nation, the final concert was held in Turin and broadcast over EIAR stations. During the final concert, the master of ceremonies, Riccardo Mantoni and comedian Guido Barbaris would question performers about their background, interests and personal aspirations. Singers then invariably performed *canzone jazzate*, a distinctive genre of Italian vocal jazz that was the result of repackaging popular American music to adhere to the demands of the regime's 1938 race laws and regulations by the Ministry of Popular Culture, or MinCulPop.[40] EIAR's popular music orchestras provided accompaniment. At the close of the second *gara della canzone* in 1940, Raul Chiodelli, EIAR's general director, exhorted the winners to "not rest happily at the level you have reached, but persevere inside the studio to reach still greater success. EIAR, for its part, will not fail to encourage, support and

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[37] Forgacs and Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War*, 183.
[38] *Radiocorriere,* December 24–30, 1939, 13.
[39] See, for example, *Radiocorriere,* December 10–16, 1939, 5.
[40] For more on the regulations MinCulPop placed on jazz and *musica leggera*, see Celenza, *Jazz Italian Style*.

reward those who demonstrate firmness of purpose and seriousness of intent."[41] Chiodelli's promise emphasized EIAR's commitment to bring winners into its studios, transforming them overnight from ordinary Italians into celebrities through major recurring roles on EIAR series and a contract with CETRA, the network's record label. The implication was political—not only did the competitions prove to be significant draws for the network, with thousands of listeners tuning in to hear the performances, they also fulfilled EIAR's obligation to identify and nurture national talent in an effort to defend Italian culture from encroachment by foreign powers.

Figure 3.1: Advertisement for *Viva la Radio!* in *Lo Schermo*, October 1939, 6.

[41] *Radiocorriere,* Feb. 11–17, 1940, 11.

Winners of the singing competitions were among the stars of another theatrical endeavor by EIAR, a variety show titled *Viva La Radio*, which from September 1939 toured to over forty-four piazzas across the country in three months (see fig. 3.1). Although EIAR had previously sponsored live concerts featuring their singers, this was the first large-scale, original live show orchestrated by the network. Playfully subtitled a "radio-trial," the drama featured three judges, resplendent in long robes and curly wigs, sitting in judgment on the radio itself. The admittedly thin plot connected a series of vignettes involving, among other things, a love duet, a crowd watching a soccer match, and a medieval tourney using fake horses. Despite lukewarm reviews—one critic called the show "dull" and "tasteless"—*Viva la radio* played to sold-out theaters throughout the country, including the Teatro Valle in Rome and the Teatro Lirico in Milan.[42] Alongside competition winners, the cast featured radio stars, among them the Trio Lescano, Ernesto Corsari, Cesare Carini and Giacomo Osella. The traveling show sought to cement the connection in listeners' minds between the voices they heard on the radio and the living, breathing embodiments of local culture that winners of the *gara della canzone* had become. "The show will allow all listeners," one ad proclaimed, "to meet in person the artists they hear on the radio."[43] The touring show had another purpose as well—to market one of the network's most exciting new ventures, EIAR's first feature-length film, produced in collaboration with the Istituto LUCE.

The film, titled *Ecco la radio*, was released in the spring following *Viva la radio*'s successful tour, on May 30, 1940, just ten days before Mussolini declared war on Britain and France. Directed by the young but already successful Giacomo Gentilomo with a screenplay by acclaimed radio personality Fulvio Palmieri, it featured both established celebrities and new stars whose careers had been launched by the 1938 and 1939 singing competitions. Opening credits introduced it as "a panorama of the radiophonic day performed by the artists, the conductors and the orchestras of EIAR." The film is structured in three sections. The first, a "day in the life" of the radio, alternates scenes of listeners and producers with fanciful

[42] The show's route was modeled after that of one of the regime's most popular cultural endeavors, the traveling theater cars known as the Carri di Tespi, which by 1936 were reaching about a million spectators a year. On the Carri di Tespi, see Chapter 1.

[43] Advertisements, promotional photos and descriptions of the variety show appeared in *Radiocorriere,* Sept. 10–16, 1939, 6; and Sept. 24–30, 1939, 13.

visualizations of what people may imagine as they listen to the radio. The second section draws entirely on existing documentary footage from "Radio Italiana XV," discussed at the beginning of this chapter. As we shall see, the final third initially dispenses with radiophonic themes as it launches into a fast-paced musical variety show, only to stage a direct confrontation between radio and film in its final scenes. Histories of EIAR have tended to forget the network's brief foray into cinema, chalking it up to either a one-off marketing scheme or to thinly-veiled fascist propaganda. Such critiques point, for example, to the scene about ten minutes into the film, in which a group of boys, after hearing about a lost child on the radio, give their leader a fascist salute before racing off to save the young girl. Paola Valentini argues that the film exemplifies "a 'radiophonicity' of the new media world and the possibility of a 'radiophonic' cinema [which] makes visible the limits of representation for sound film," but sees this radiophonic media system as an elaborate visualization of the ever-present authoritarian voice.[44] While such an Adornian reading has its merits, it fails to account for the series of multimedia projects that EIAR undertook during the 1930s, of which *Ecco la radio* was only one. Like *I quattro moschettieri* and *Viva la radio*, the film sought to fulfill the regime's directive to celebrate Italian voices and Italian products, while at the same time promoting EIAR stations and actors in an effort to gain new subscribers for the network.

Ecco la radio took as its central premise the possibility, through film, of making visible the programs listeners heard every day. A reviewer from 1940 described it thus: "After you have seen this film, listening daily to the radio, and putting in a touch of imagination, it will be as if you already had the television apparatus. Because in listening to music, sounds or voices you cannot help but see… the faces of the people who provide you with entertainment or information. So you will understand that a film titled *Ecco la radio* is nothing but an EIAR program brought to the screen. In other words [it is] a type of show that diverts and interests the public like all shows of this time, [but] having over others one advantage: that of the satisfaction that comes from seeing how the 'characters' of the radio are made."[45] This presented a problem, however—how to make it clear to viewers that they were "watching" radio?

Michel Chion has described a number of roles in film for "on-the-air"

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[44] Paola Valentini, *Presenze sonore. Il passaggio al sonoro in Italia tra cinema e radio* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007), 225.
[45] "Ecco la radio," *La Tribuna*, Jun 28, 1940.

sound, or sounds transmitted electronically by radio, television, or other sound technologies. These sounds can appear in "closeup—clear and sharp, as if the film's loudspeaker were directly plugged into" the device pictured onscreen. At the other extreme they can be identified within the film's sound-world or diegesis, "to produce an effect of distancing… [from] whatever their onscreen source is." In the case of on-the-air music, such as music playing through an onscreen radio, "the sound of [the] music can transcend or blur the zones of onscreen, offscreen, and non-diegetic" depending on factors such as whether the emphasis is on the sound's initial source (the real instruments that play or the voice that sings) or on the terminal source (the electronic speaker present in the filmic narrative). Sounds from a radio therefore have the ability in film to cross the boundaries of cinematic space, moving between acousmatic (or sound without a visible source), offscreen, and onscreen; for Chion, radio sound in film necessarily gestures towards an invisible initial or terminal source, or both, depending on the image pictured.[46] All of these tactics appear in EIAR's film. However, there is one major difference between *Ecco la radio* and the films described by Chion, or other films of the period whose plots center around radio technologies.[47] In *Ecco la radio*, all sound is presumed to emerge from the radio, whether or not the device is pictured onscreen.

The first half of *Ecco la radio* pictures the ideal radio listener and imagines what this listener sees. Since radio broadcasting is itself characterized by close juxtaposition of short, unrelated segments of music, news, and sports, the loose narrative structure typical of a variety show was a particularly apt model for visualizing the radio experience. The film's first section pictures a "day-in-the-life" of the radio, beginning with the announcer's morning greetings, followed by recipes enjoyed by a housewife in her kitchen. It then veers through a patchwork of narratives: a young couple's illicit tryst is interrupted by disapproving parents; dramatic narration and drumming underscore an adventurer hunting a cannibalistic tribe; a violin-toting devil torments a be-wigged nobleman as school-boys listen to a fiery rendition of Tartini's "Devil's Trill Sonata." In each of these

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[46] Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 77.

[47] *Ecco la radio* is part of a trend in the late 1930s of films whose plots center around broadcasting technologies. Take, for example, Bragaglia's *Una famiglia impossibile* (1940), in which a young woman falls in love with a singer whose voice she has only ever heard on the radio.

scenes, the radio moves between acousmatic sound and sound closeup, and from diegetic source to underscore, depending on whether the image shows entranced listeners tuning in, as with the housewife copying down her recipe, or visualizes listeners' fanciful imaginings. The film troubles these straightforward readings, as in the first scene, in which a separated couple yearn after one another to the tune of a popular waltz. As the lyrics describe their love, the young girl sneaks past a disapproving matron to join her paramour in the garden, where—set among the trees and trilling sounds of birdsong—a radio is revealed to be playing the waltz. By locating the radio within the diegesis (if incongruously in the center of a lush garden), the clip troubles a purely acousmatic reading of the radio sound, in which the music would function as an underscore, outside of the diegesis and therefore inaudible to the characters. The film complicates this rather straightforward reading through its failure to include other diegetic sounds (for example, the singing of birds, clank of the ladders, and audible dialogue) and the introductory narration to the scene, which informs us that we will hear (and see) "a dream born of a waltz transmitted by the radio." By opening with the music's initial source (the studio) and fading into a dream-like romantic narrative, this short scene initiates a process which will prove crucial in the film: that of blurring the line between film viewer and radio listener, the one who watches and the one who listens.

The radiophonic day concludes with a variety program titled "Gatto bianco," which occupies the final third of the film. The show follows the antics of two radio celebrities—Fausto Tommei and Nunzio Filogamo of *I quattro moschettieri* fame. These familiar figures play two down-on-their luck actors who, upon realizing that they closely resemble the two famous radio actors Nunzio Filogamo and Fausto Tommei, decide to infiltrate EIAR studios by masquerading as the stars. Along the way, they encounter various personalities, and are eventually stopped by a fan who invites them into his restaurant to meet his staff, who themselves turn out to be singers. The restaurateur helpfully introduces each character by the performer's real name as the camera frames each of them in turn, so that there can be no confusion in the viewer's mind if the singer's appearance fails to trigger recognition. The actors playing the restaurant workers were newcomers to the airwaves, winners of the singing competitions whose voices may have been familiar to viewers but whose images were less recognizable than those of long-time radio celebrities Filogamo and Tommei. The scene could have given each of these newly-crowned stars a fictional name, but this would have been counterproductive. For if the film, like *Viva la radio*, was meant to

project radio celebrities into a visual medium for their listening fans, then identifying each performer threatened to transform the cameos into marketing tools to encourage fans to buy those performers' records and listen to their radio shows. Further, if viewers could not identify the individual performers, they would fail to get the core message of the scene, which is that it constructs a diegetic world in which the very air resonates with Italian voices. The scene pictures winners of the singing competitions, once identified in print and broadcasts by their region and hometown, united in song. The kitchen thus becomes a kind of radio, a medium through which listeners hear sounds from across the nation. Because all sound in *Ecco la radio* is radiophonic sound, the scene makes the claim—without ever showing the mechanism—that radio is the ideal medium for producing and disseminating a unified, national voice.

Typical of the variety show genre, the "Gatto bianco" section of the film moves frenetically from song to song and scene to scene: the Trio Lescano sing their 1937 hit "Oh Mama!", followed by a wedding march, a couple dancing and singing in the rain, and so on.[48] Not until the end of the film does the radio make another appearance. The final scene begins with a couple seated on either side of a receiver in a white room, listening to jazz music. Like listeners shown earlier in the film, this pair are focused, their attention entirely directed to the radio. The camera pans out to show dozens of listeners similarly clustered around receivers. Finally the source of the music is revealed to be EIAR's three main jazz orchestras, located on tiered platforms directly behind the seated couples. As the music crescendos, the listeners leap up and begin dancing, hands held, in a circle around the receivers, which stand out starkly black against the white background. One young man spins in the center, eventually colliding with the central receiver and falling to the ground. The music reaches its climax as the image of the whirling dancers morphs into a vertical shot of a radio tower, which concludes the film. If this scene stages the final confrontation between radio and film, then it is radio that has won the day. Radio sound, previously relegated to an acousmatic state, is reattached to both its initial and terminal sources in the form of the jazz orchestras and radio receivers. The glaring

[48] The final section of *Ecco la radio!* showcases performers of Italian jazz, which has led Anna Celenza to argue that "although EIAR tried to please all tastes, preference was given to the music of the youth: Italian jazz as it was represented in the performances of the Trio Lescano, Barzizza's Cetra Orchestra and Angelini's Orchestra da Ballo dell'EIAR." Celenza, *Jazz Italian Style*, 153.

white set is transformed into a microcosm of the Italian media landscape, populated entirely by radio listeners and producers and the technologies that connect them, echoing with undeniably radiophonic sounds.

EIAR would not produce any more films, a decision network executives blamed on a lack of resources after Italy's entry into the war. In 1940 and 1941, the network did produce two more traveling variety shows starring many of the same performers from *Viva la radio* and *Ecco la radio*. These reviews were directed primarily at those aiding the war effort—they traveled between army camps and hospitals, and were transmitted over the radio for soldiers stationed abroad. There would not be any more singing competitions or *L'ora del dilettante*. They would return, the editor of *Radiocorriere* responded to one listener query, "at the end of the war, upon a guaranteed victory."[49] Further multimedia experiments were under way, however, in the form of EIAR's first television broadcasts, which are the subject of the next chapter.

[49] *Radiocorriere,* Jan. 24–31, 1943, 4.

Chapter 4: From Radio to Radio-visione

On 22 July 1939, viewers crowded into the television viewing room of the Villaggio Balneare ("bathing village") set up in Rome's Circus Maximus, sponsored by the television companies SAFAR and Fernseh. Six television sets, described by one Roman newspaper as somewhere between a mirror and a large radio, lined one wall.[1] Spectators stood shoulder to shoulder in the packed hall, craning their necks to glimpse the images on these screens, each of which measured less than half the size of today's 42-inch televisions. From the inset speakers rang the lilting tones and rollicking antics of Italian radio's most popular musical performers and comedians. The crowd gasped, laughed, and applauded as the stars whose voices had graced their homes for more than a decade appeared to them for the first time on the small screen.

The images that so entranced the audience, and the devices that captured them, were the result of over a decade of effort. EIAR had maintained exclusive control over Italian airwaves since its creation in 1927. Initially, EIAR's subscriber list numbered around forty thousand, but that number jumped to more than one million by the end of the 1930s as the network worked to reach new listeners.[2] But even as Italian radio extended its reach and expanded its audiences, pressure came from the regime and from listeners to unite sound and image, in the form of broadcast television. As early as 1929—only five years after the first Italian radio broadcast—engineers Alessandro Banfi and Sergio Bertolotti conducted experiments in transmitting images over radio waves from EIAR studios. A decade later, these experiments in "radio-vision" would lead to the events just described—

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[1] "The biggest crowd of people immediately rushed to the Palazzo della Radio. They gathered in front of the first-floor theater where the television experiments, the first in Italy that the public could witness, were set to begin… Six televisions, a sort of large radio set that bears a kind of mirror measuring about 30 centimeters by 40 cm, were distributed around the theater. While the rest of the apparatus functions just like a good radio, in those mirrors the public could, in addition to hearing, see the announcer introducing the program and then the actors Edoardo Spadaro, Nelly Corradì and Walter Molino, who offered proof of their virtuosity." "Il Villaggio Balneare si apre oggi a Roma," *Corriere della Sera*, Jul. 22 1939, 2; "Festa di luci e di popolo al Villaggio Balneare," *Corriere della Sera* Jul. 23, 1939, 5.

[2] The growing audience was in part the result of programs like *Radio Balilla*, which developed low-cost receivers to be sold to rural communities. For more, see Philip Cannistraro, "The Radio in Fascist Italy," *Journal of European Studies* 2 (1972), 127–54.

the first public transmission of images over radio waves in Italy, visible to the public from the viewing room.

More than simply another way to entertain EIAR's growing population of subscribers, these experimental broadcasts served as evidence of Italian fascism's standing on the world stage. The Magneti Marelli equipment used for the transmissions, developed in consultation with engineers from the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), was regularly cited as proof of Italy's rapid technological development, and thus of the nation's hard-won progress.[3] EIAR lauded the political value of the television experiments in the pages of *Radiocorriere*, boasting that the television broadcasts were "the greatest, most curious attraction" within the exhibition, and a manifestation of "fascist spirit."[4] By August 10, the Roman newspaper *Il Messaggero* reported that the Villaggio Balneare had seen at least twelve thousand visitors, nearly all of who had visited the viewing room to marvel at the new technology.[5] The spectacle demonstrated television's ability to showcase "the most beautiful and vigorous images of the Italian race and art" and catapulted Italian technologies into the global marketplace.[6]

What follows is a history of disappointment. Despite the network's lofty ambitions, EIAR's public television experiments were short-lived, discontinued less than two years after they began. Italian networks would not attempt television transmission again until a decade later. Yet the broadcasts revealed a politics of spectacle that placed images, seeing and being seen at the center of modern political life. Events like EIAR's television experiments reveal a much tighter linkage among culture, technology, commerce and politics than is typically attributed to fascist cultural policy or practice. In this chapter, I will explore the official policies, technological limitations, aesthetic premises, and programming decisions that shaped the radio network's early experiments with television, ultimately suggesting that these early sorties into televisual broadcasting left traces that continue to

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[3] As one contributor to *Italia fascista* wrote, "It can be said that having seen television is not the privilege of a lucky few, but that most of the inhabitants of the capital have already witnessed the greatest scientific innovation of our time… built with material supplied exclusively by the national industry." Leonardo Algardi, "La Televisione in Italia," *Italia fascista*, 1939. Cited in Diego Verdegiglio, *La Tv di Mussolini: sperimentazioni televisive nel ventennio fascista* (Rome: Cooper & Castelvecchi, 2003), 188.

[4] "L'Eiar inizia le trasmissioni televisive," *Radiocorriere,* July 23–29, 1939, 3.

[5] *Il Messaggero,* 10 August, 1939, 4.

[6] "L'Eiar inizia le trasmissioni televisive." *Radiocorriere*, July 23–29, 1939, 3.

shape the style and political clout of Italian television.

The Battle for Autarchy

The late 1930s saw a number of changes in fascism's cultural policies. While the regime propagated a myth of ideological unity and organic totality, historians of the period have shown that the reality was much more haphazard and contingent.[7] Marla Stone has shown how spectacles such as the "Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution," an exercise in historical propaganda mounted in Rome in 1932, blended a variety of aesthetic styles to create the illusion of a "fascist Gesamtkunstwerk of art, drama, propaganda, and entertainment."[8] This defining characteristic of fascist aesthetics—its magpie-like ability to foster and embrace seemingly contradictory artistic styles—remained a central aspect of the regime's cultural platform until the late 1930s. The transformation of the Ministry of Press and Propaganda into the larger Ministry of Popular Culture (MinCulPop) late in 1937, motivated in part by the need to control discourse around the 1935 Ethiopian campaign, led to the centralized control of the culture industry and to increased scrutiny and censorship of cultural products. By 1939, when the television viewing studio opened its doors at the Villaggio Balneare, a culture industry that had once been characterized by its eclectic appropriation of both "high" and "low" cultures had become largely homogenized.

The technology on display in the television viewing room was the result of nearly a decade of experimentation by the network.[9] In 1928, EIAR

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[7] As Jeffrey Schnapp puts it, "fascism often amounted to little more than a complex of ethical principles, credos, myths and aversions, held together by opportunism and rhetorical aesthetic glue." Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 6.

[8] Stone, *The Patron State: Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, 1998), 130. Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi has argued that the politics of spectacle produced during fascism was directed towards constructing a single object of desire: the public-facing persona of Mussolini. See Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 144.

[9] In addition to the publicly-funded network, several private corporations were also responsible for promoting and developing Italian television. The aforementioned SAFAR and Radiomarelli, a branch of the Fiat-owned group Magneti Marelli (which also produced and sold radio receivers) partnered with EIAR to design and build the nation's first television broadcasting station in Milan.

had created the first Italian laboratory for television experimentation at its headquarters in Milan, and a year later the laboratory transmitted its first televisual image, of the lifelike Lenci-brand felt doll. In 1930, another experimental television laboratory opened at the network's Turin headquarters with a significantly larger staff composed of engineers and radio technicians, and in 1931 the laboratories displayed their ongoing progress at the Mostra Nazionale della Radio (National Radio Exhibition) in Milan. In May of 1939, a few months before the broadcasts described above, the Italian radio and television producer SAFAR arranged for a display of closed-circuit television at a technological exhibition called the Mostra Leonardesca.[10] The show was attended by both Mussolini and the emperor and king of Italy Vittorio Emanuele III, who reportedly enjoyed the content of the transmissions, but was especially pleased by "the excellent reception offered by televisions of Italian construction."[11] The brief programs were transmitted not over radio waves but over cables, which meant that only those attending the exhibition—mostly industry professionals—could watch.[12] The real public demonstration of the social, artistic, and political value of the new medium would come with the exhibition at the Villaggio Balneare in July, for which the broadcasting company placed additional screens in store windows along the Via del Corso, a major shopping street in Rome, to broadcast the sounds and images of radio stars to the public.

Any material trace of the bathing village in the Circus Maximus disappeared long before the fall of Mussolini's government in 1943. However, like many of the regime's pet projects, it is immortalized in photographs and videos from the Istituto LUCE, which produced educational and propagandistic films for the regime. LUCE films show laughing spectators

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Designer Francesco Vecchiacchi was brought in to oversee the project. Radiomarelli also collaborated with RCA to produce the first 441-line television system, a significant improvement over the previous 180-line system. For more on collaboration between RCA and Radiomarelli, see Guido Vannucchi and Franco Visintin, "Radiofonia e televisione: era analogica" in *Storia delle telecomunicazioni,* Vol. 1, edited by Virginio Cantoni, Gabriele Falciasecca, and Giuseppe Pelosi (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2011), 408–480.

[10] One of the premiere Italian radio and television producers at the time, SAFAR also produced the cameras used in EIAR's first television studio on Via Asiago in Rome.

[11] Camillo Boscia, "La Radiovisione alla Fiera di Milano," *Radiocorriere*, May 5–11, 1940, 11.

[12] Verdegiglio, *La Tv di Mussolini*, 175.

lining up to enter the TV viewing studio, leaping into the crowded pool, or sipping a coffee at the restaurant. Despite a wealth of entertainments—the swimming village provided the site for exhibitions of modern radio and television technologies alongside a "Colonial Home" exhibit with live monkeys and gazelles and furnished with art from Italian-occupied Libya—the television studio was one of the Villaggio Balneare's most popular attractions for the half a million visitors to the bathing village in the summer of 1939. Its location in the heart of Rome, on the grounds of the Circus Maximus, reinforced the contradictory nature of the events taking place there: at once ancient heritage and modern spectacle. One of the most recognizable sites of ancient Rome, the circus had once hosted massive *ludi* for the amusement of the Roman people and the glorification of the gods. Throughout the fascist *ventennio*, the ancient site was used as a backdrop for public events, such as parades and rallies, and as an exhibition space that featured and promoted images of an ordered and idealized fascist society.[13] Excavation and restoration projects from 1932 onwards had transformed the vast circus from a dilapidated ruin, described by one chronicler as "crumbling slums, shored-up walls, little squares reduced to puddles, streets with their pavement destroyed, fields with unsightly industrial installations, deposits of rags, [and] warehouses of all sorts of refuse" into a pristine stone oval that accurately reproduced the contours of the ancient circus, while suppressing elements of the original design that failed to conform to Mussolini's (and his chief archaeologist Antonio Muñoz's) vision of the ancient monument.[14]

The pavilion itself was a shining monument to Italian self-sufficiency, boasting a grandiose imperial eagle framed by the inscriptions "AUTARCHY" and "Mussolini is always right."[15] Both the eagle and its mount were "covered in nailed aluminum sheeting, which is to say, draped in [Italy's] national metal par excellence."[16] Combining an unabashedly modern visual aesthetic

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[13] Aristotle Kallis, "The Factory of Illusions in the 'Third Rome': Circus Maximus as a Space of Fascist Simulation," *Fascism* 3 (2014), 20–45.

[14] Kallis, "The Factory of Illusions," 29.

[15] The pavilion had been newly designed for an exhibition of Italian minerals and technology (the Mostra autarchica del Minerale italiano, or MAMI) the previous year.

[16] "… tanto l'acquila quanto la parte che la inquadra sono rivestite di lamiere chiodate di alluminio e cioè del metallo nazionale per eccellenza." P.N.F. L'Autarchia del Minerale Italiano—Guida della Mostra, Roma—Circo Massimo, Rome 1938, 79. Translated in Jeffrey Schnapp, "Mostre" in *Kunst und Propaganda:*

with references to Rome's ancient heritage emblematized in the imperial eagle, the pavilion embodied Mussolini's vision of a culturally dynamic, self-reliant fascist society. The message emblazoned on the front of the pavilion referred to the regime's policy of autarchy, or national self-sufficiency, adopted in response to sanctions imposed by the League of Nations after Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. This new economic policy inspired narratives of national pride and independence, which were disseminated through propaganda campaigns in newsreels, films and radio broadcasts. In the cultural realm, the official embrace of autarchy was perfectly tailored to address anxiety about the absence of national culture that had troubled Italian elites since the Risorgimento. Economically, autarchy spoke to the parallel convictions that Italy had never successfully modernized, and that Italian cultural products were inferior to those of the United States, France or Germany. The policy ignited debates over how best to control and limit the influence of foreign culture, from Hollywood films to foreign-produced radio sets, within Italian borders.[17] For many critics of autarchical policies, the need to support Italian products conflicted with a desire to maintain cosmopolitan perspectives and power in a global market. As the pro-fascist journalist and writer Giovanni Papini warned, writing in 1937: "The principle of autarchy in the field of ideas [*nel campo spirituale*] is dangerous. The only concrete form it can take is a ban on translations. We would be seen as barbarians… And to prevent intellectual relations between countries is an impossible task, beyond the powers of any man, even a very powerful one. I don't think that M. [Mussolini] would be in favor of this kind of autarchy."[18]

As we saw in Chapter 1, among the regime's ongoing efforts to forge

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Im Streit der Nationen 1930–1945, Hans J. Czech and Nikola Doll, eds. (Dresden: Sandstein Kommunikation, 2007), 60–69.

[17] Even while intellectuals raged at Hollywood in the papers, the constant presence of American films in Italy throughout the 1930s and war years is emblematic of the challenges the regime faced in completely cutting off culture from beyond its borders. See Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922–1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); and Barbara Spackman, "Shopping for Autarchy: Fascism and Reproductive Fantasy in Mario Camerini's Grandi magazzini" in *Re-viewing Fascism: Italian Cinema, 1922–1943*, Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 276–292.

[18] Giovanni Papini, Letter of July 12, 1937 in Giovanni Papini-Attilio Vallecchi, *Carteggio (1914– 1941),* Mario Gozzini, ed. (Florence: Vallecchi, 1984), 267. Translated in David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle, *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 104.

national culture on a massive scale was the Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND), dedicated to organizing recreational programs for industrial workers and rural peasants. Victoria De Grazia has shown that the OND was motivated by efforts to develop a "popular culture" and through it popular consensus for the regime.[19] In addition to film screenings and performances of traveling opera and theater productions, the organization hosted sporting matches, children's competitions, and gatherings dedicated to radio listening. By organizing workers' leisure time, the OND sought to convince the nearly four million working Italians of fascism's benevolent nature. During the autarchy years enrollment in the OND increased by hundreds of thousands of members.[20] Neighborhood associations and rural clubs raised chickens, rabbits, bees, and even silkworms in an effort to supply the nation. Italians in urban centers could offer the regime less in terms of raising chickens and sowing grain, but city-dwellers were urged to "buy Italian" through advertisements, film, and radio broadcasts.

From the beginning, EIAR engineers and producers involved themselves in these debates. Arturo Castellani, engineer and technical director of SAFAR, claimed that, through the collaboration of television and radio producers with the national broadcasting entity, "Italian television has learned to be completely independent from the influence of other nations, as English and German television are from that of the United States."[21] Radio programming proved difficult for advocates of national self-sufficiency to harness, since radio waves did not stop at national borders, and listeners could easily tune into stations transmitted from abroad. Instead, producers found themselves advocating for the production and distribution of a more tangible commodity—Italian-made radios and televisions. Particularly in the production and sale of this equipment, Italy seemed to be ceding ground to its international competitors. Articles and advertisements framed the debate over economic autarchy as a battle between Italy and foreign powers.[22] Thus a 1940 advertisement for a new valve constructed by Radio Balilla pictured a boy, wearing the fez of the Opera Nazionale Balilla, tossing the valve through the window of a shop featuring "materiale radiofonico," with the caption, "The *Balilla* valve from 'Fivre' crushes foreign products." (See fig. 4.1) Like the

[19] De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organisation of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 58.
[20] De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*, 125.
[21] Arturo Castellani, "A che punto è la televisione?" *Sapere*, March 15, 1938, 152.
[22] "È arrivata la Televisione!" *L'Antenna*, October 31, 1939, 541.

Figure 4.1: "The *Balilla* valve from 'Fivre' crushes foreign products." Advertisement published in *L'Antenna*, January 30, 1940, 3.

youth organization that shared its name, the advertisement drew on an anecdote from Italy's mythologized past: the story of a young boy, nicknamed Balilla, who was purported to have thrown a rock at Habsburg forces in Genoa, thereby igniting a revolt in 1746. Balilla was immortalized in the "Inno di Mameli," a popular song that would become the republic's national anthem in 1946. The character of Balilla, associated with nationalist pride and youthful defiance, took on a newly capitalist orientation in the 1940 ad. Thus the ad for Radio Balilla featured glass shattering over two signs that advertised devices "Made in" and "Fabriqué en," in a not-so-subtle nod to the United Kingdom, the United States, and France, nations that—along with Germany, which notably is not mentioned in the ad—were major competitors to Italian-based producers. By 1939, each of these countries had begun distributing commercial television sets. The violence of the ad's imagery resonated with the increased national fervor over preserving and protecting local culture from foreign influences, a panic that had driven the passage of the anti-Semitic Racial Laws only the year before.

Advertisements for the broadcasts likewise emphasized the autarchical value of advances in television. One full-page ad in *Radiocorriere*

featured the image of television transmitters recently erected by SAFAR: "Behold the autarchical television transmitter!" (see. fig. 4.2) Above the sheer wall of gleaming metal, seeming to emerge from the space behind the transmitters, towered the Capitoline Wolf, the ancient sculpture picturing the mythical she-wolf suckling the twins Romulus and Remus housed on Rome's Capitoline Hill. The sculpture balanced precariously on an encircled eagle bearing the letters SPQR, the municipal symbol for the city of Rome. Beside the eagle and dominating the white space of the advertisement a quote from an earlier issue of *Radiocorriere* touted "...the best in the world today in the realm of radio-vision!" The overtly political use of images related to the city of Rome, the capital of the fascist state, would not have been lost on the readers of *Radiocorriere*, since such combinations of classical and modern symbolism were already part of the graphic signature of the fascist regime. EIAR's radio broadcasts, along with LUCE newsreels, had already served to propagate the message that Mussolini and his government were the direct descendants of the ancient empire, with broadcasts suggesting that "the history of Rome is continuous, uninterrupted, as is...exemplified in this incomparable City, which has undergone sacks, struggles, misery, suffering, but has never been annihilated, which has never disappeared."[23] The ad likewise positioned television as one element of a multimedia project undertaken by the regime to fulfill the aims of Rome's great past. But radio and television were more than just didactic tools for transmitting information about a constructed history; they seemed to herald a spectacular new chapter in fascism's imperial narrative.[24]

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[23] Forges Davanzati, radio address of February 11, 1935.; translated in Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity*: *The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 39.

[24] EIAR regularly transmitted historical lecture series and served as an advertising platform for the various didactic projects designed by the regime to reinforce its imperial imagery. For example, on the occasion of the 1937 Mostra Augustea della Romanità, organizers used the radio to arouse curiosity in the general public through a series of educational broadcasts and short slogans; see Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity*, 150.

Figure 4.2: "...the best in the world today in the realm of radio-vision!" Advertisement published in *Radiocorriere*, July 30-August 5, 1939, 14.

Radio Meets Television

There is little doubt that EIAR understood the target audience for its pioneering television broadcasts to be primarily people who had previous experience with listening to the radio. Producers elected to fill the screens with tried-and-true radio personalities, many of who had gotten their start in the network's annual song competitions. "All who visit the Radio-Television Pavilion, located in the picturesque bathing village in the Circus Maximus," one advertisement proclaimed, "will have the pleasant surprise of seeing projected on television screens placed there for the public not only the artists they have already seen on the stage, but also those whom they know only by the sounds of their voices, which through the Radio have frequently been welcome guests in their homes."[25] The advertisement presaged the sentiments of film historian Rick Altman, who once claimed that "every television includes a radio," a pithy statement that encapsulated a number of assumptions about the relationship between the two media.[26] Altman's goal was not to diminish the importance of television as a category, but rather to

[25] "Televisione: Artisti che partecipano ai programmi della settimana," *Radiocorriere,* 23–29 July 1939, 12.
[26] Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 16.

underline the medium's historical contingency and the central role radio played in its development, a point also made by numerous studies of the connections between the radio industry and early television broadcasting.[27] More recent studies have sought instead to reframe the tight linkage between the televisual image and sound without relinquishing it completely.[28] The advertisement positioned television as the new domestic medium capable of filling the image gap that the "blind" radio left open, with words that in hindsight seem to portend the looming end of the romance between radio and television.

In most Western countries, early television was bound to radio by its very nature. Both were broadcast media in the literal sense, "broadly" disseminating a signal, whether sound or image. The two media were also linked more practically, since the radio industry provided the dominant infrastructure required for television broadcasting. The media were also linked at the level of practice by virtue of the fact that the radio industry provided the dominant framework and the infrastructure required for television broadcasting. Italian engineers were not the first to begin experimenting with television broadcasting, nor was EIAR's public display of radio-vision an anomaly in the 1930s. Experiments by engineers such as John Logie Baird over the course of the 1920s and 1930s led to the rapid development of devices for transmitting and receiving images that themselves built on nineteenth- and twentieth-century technologies, including wireless radio and picture telegraphy. Indeed, experiments with television on a global scale were largely framed as the next logical step in advancing radio technologies. Television found a foothold in the United Kingdom with regular transmissions from the Alexandra Palace beginning in 1936. Just a few months before EIAR's experiments, in April 1939, RCA broadcast the World's Fair from New York City in a transmission that would mark the first regularly scheduled television broadcast in the United States. Radio producers and broadcasters spent these years working to improve the

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[27] The intersection between the radio and television industries has been particularly well documented in histories of American media, including Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920–1934* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); and Douglas Gomery, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).
[28] See, for example, Luke Stadel, "Radio/Television/Sound: Radio Aesthetics and Perceptual Technics in Early American Television," *e-media studies* 5 (2016). https://journals.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Journals.woa/1/xmlpage/4/article/458.

quality of television images and to produce high-quality receivers that audiences could afford to install in their homes. Despite their efforts, although television is now often regarded as the quintessential private and domestic media form, for much of this period—as with the early days of radio—television viewing remained a public, rather than domestic, activity.[29]

Engineers and businessmen throughout Europe and America were racing to achieve the transmission of images with sound on a national platform, but in Italy the quest seemed particularly urgent because of the importance of one image in particular: that of the Duce. Mussolini's image appeared in films, newspapers, postcards and photographs, and even in a calendar published by the fascist party and sold to enthusiastic party members who wanted to make Mussolini's visage part of their home décor.[30] Such images served not only to develop a fan base— a veritable "cult of the Duce"—but also to establish Mussolini as a constant presence in the lives of Italian citizens, whose image they would encounter everywhere from the barber shop to the bakery, and even in their own homes. Television was a significant enhancement on these still images because (like radio) it offered the possibility of simultaneity, of transmitting immediately and accurately the Duce's voice and gestures, as well as his likeness. When journalists were invited to EIAR's Rome studio in 1937 for a demonstration of the new television equipment, the example that received far and away the most attention in coverage of the event was a transmission of footage from a speech given by Mussolini to military troops gathered in Alto Adige.[31] However, the ambitions of EIAR engineers to transmit an image of the Duce into every Italian's home far exceeded the abilities of the technologies available to them.

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[29] Much of our understanding of television's social role and medial power can be traced back to the influential theory of Raymond Williams, who coined the term "mobile privatization" to describe the way television allowed viewers to witness the events of the outside world from the privacy of their own homes. Williams saw television as the inheritor of radio's intimate relationship to listeners, and as displacing the experience of live theater into the safe, easily controlled space of the home. See Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (Psychology Press, 2003), 25; Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); and Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[30] Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle,* 78.

[31] Orsino Orsini, "La television," *Radiocorriere,* May 30–June 5, 1937, 4. Orsini also wrote about the experience in the Turin newspaper *Gazzetta del Popolo*.

In addition to the difficulty of reaching audiences, EIAR's commercial and political goals were regularly checked by the technological constraints of the new medium. While the radio studio had for decades been the site for reconstructing the sound of the concert hall or opera house, or the more exotic settings of radio dramas, the 30 by 7 meter television studio at Via Asiago in Rome bore the additional burden of transmitting visual as well as sonic information. The studio included a complex illumination system and room for an orchestra to accompany musical numbers, with the shooting performed by means of a camera mounted on a mobile trolley so as to follow the scene continuously. A special glass booth, raised a couple of meters above the floor of the transmission hall, housed the director and a control panel from which one could operate the lights. Adjacent rooms housed the technical equipment and semicircular control desk. Two scenes could be captured at the same time, with the aid of two cameras (one of which was generally occupied transmitting prerecorded films), and the transmission could be switched seamlessly from one scene to the other at any time.[32] The studio's diminutive size restricted producers' access to certain theatrical effects, including changing backdrops and the creative use of lighting and mirrors, and limited the televised programs to intimate dramatic settings. It is therefore no surprise that several short dramas, aired during the broadcasts, took place in confined spaces, including "I pericoli dell'ascensore," whose action took place entirely inside an elevator.[33] Offices and hallways served as the sets for a longer play titled "Ho scritto un bel soggetto," composed by acclaimed screenwriter Vincenzo Rovi.[34] Musical revues were among the most common types of programming for the new

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[32] *Gazzetta del Popolo,* January 25, 1939. Another description in the *Il labello*, the magazine of the Gruppo Universitario Fascista, emphasized the human labor involved in making the small space of the studio function: "The studio, which was not very large, could, at first glance, be mistaken for a small film studio… But a different atmosphere reigned: men in white coats (the sound and image technicians), some of them wearing headphones, gathered around a camera, which was simple in its design… The men in white moved around the actors with meticulous precision, at the orders of the director (who watched from a raised glass booth), to create the effect that in a film studio could be produced by re-creating the scenes again and again." Virgilio Sabel, cited in Verdegiglio, *La Tv di Mussolini*, 189. Translation my own.

[33] "Radiovisione," *Radiocorriere,* October 8–14, 1939, 8.

[34] "Un'avventura americana in radiovisione," *Radiocorriere,* February 25–March 2, 1939, 5.

medium—listeners were already accustomed to the genre's flimsy plots and seemingly random musical interludes, which had been a cornerstone of radio programming since the medium's inception. Revues did not require the same level of scene-setting as narrative-based comedy or drama, which allowed them to fit within the modest confines of the television studio without the need for excessive set changes.

These practical constraints, paired with the network's desire to draw viewers in large numbers, meant that the musical and theatrical programming developed for the experimental broadcasts—a combination of concerts and short plays—was more like a visually illustrated version of popular radio variety shows than an overtly propagandistic mouthpiece for the values or politics of the regime. Because the broadcasts were not recorded, we can only glean details of their programming from reviews and advertisements published in trade journals. Through richly detailed descriptions, these articles aimed to recreate the televisual image for Italian readers who, by virtue of their distance from Rome, had yet to witness the marvels of the new technology. The broadcast of a performance of the popular song "Passeggiando per Milano" during the 1939 Rome transmissions demonstrates the ways the technical realities of early television intersected with—and to some extent impeded—the kind of coordinated media messaging that we have come to expect of fascist political communications. The song was probably selected because of its popularity among EIAR listeners, who had very likely already encountered the recording, perhaps during one of the orchestra's regular evening transmissions of dance music.[35] The lyrics seem tailor-made for a transmission designed to promote the modernity and efficiency of life under fascism. The narrator wanders past the famous Galleria and the Duomo, watching the people pass as they walk to the theater and shops, composing a love song to city life in general and to Milan in particular. He maintains a singular focus on what he sees, from the "mille luci rosse, verdi e blu" [a thousand red, green, and blue lights] of the Galleria to the interior of the massive Duomo, and equates sight with understanding, with the chorus

[35] This well-known song, by Marf (Mario Bonavita) and Vittorio Mascheroni, had been recorded by the Orchestra dell'EIAR conducted by Cinico Angelini, and the recording distributed by CETRA, the publicly owned record label that was an extension of the radio entity. Upbeat fox-trots like "Passeggiando per Milano" were among the most popular dance forms played during this dance shows of this period. See "Il ballo radiofonico," *Radiocorriere*, May 2–9, 1926, 6.

proclaiming "passeggiando per Milano, camminando piano piano, quante cose puoi vedere, quante cose puoi sapere" [walking through Milan, walking slowly, how many things one can see, how many things one can know].

Yet while the text evoked images of the crowded Milanese streets, the camera showed something completely different, focusing in turn on various members and groups from the orchestra, thus emphasizing the concert atmosphere within the studio.[36] This disjunction between image and music would not have disturbed viewers, who had nearly a decade of experience with commercial sound film and newsreels that paired music with images. By using the camera to reinforce the existence of the sound source, rather than to imagine the subject of the song, the transmission hints at the technical constraints of these early broadcasts, and at some of the choices available to engineers. Remote live television transmission was as yet impossible—all broadcasts were limited to sets constructed in the small studio space or to pre-recorded films. "Passeggiando per Milano" could still have been illustrated onscreen with prerecorded film featuring images of Milan's bustling streets and galleries, an option that may have contrasted pleasantly with the ancient circus and modern Roman streets where viewers gathered. Instead, engineers chose to pair the soundtrack with images of the orchestra as it played, thereby highlighting the synchronized capture of both image and sound and emphasizing the transmission's immediacy. The sounds of the orchestra, which listeners accustomed to radio broadcasting could easily identify as immediate transmissions, served as reference points for the images, signaling without the need for explanation that image and sound were synchronized. This was a far cry from the quasi-omnipotent, ever-present image of the Duce extending directly into the viewer's home—first, the new medium had to convince viewers of its legitimacy, just as the radio had done little more than a decade before.

Producers thought of the medium as one in which, like radio, variety was paramount and rapid shifts between journalistic, musical, and dramatic programming were to be expected. One example of this is the popular revue,

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[36] The description of this "scena teatrale" came from the aforementioned issue of *L'Antenna,* a technical magazine that otherwise focused primarily on the transmitting station. The full description reads, "One of these scenes consisted of an agile and well-considered sequence of shots showing members of the Orchestra Moderna, directed by maestro Saverio Seracini, in the act of playing a song that is now very popular: 'Passeggiando per Milano.' A series of panoramic shots, properly executed, allowed the camera to capture the entire orchestra as a whole." "Televisione in Italia," *L'Antenna*, August 31, 1939, 470. Translation my own.

Al cavallino baio, which staged its drama in a crowded restaurant complete with patrons who interrupted musical numbers by popular singers Lia Origoni and Lidia Pasquilini with loud toasts and idle chatter, a scene one reviewer described as akin to passing "an evening in a beer hall, where sparkling songs alternated with customers' happy toasts, creating an atmosphere of healthy vitality."[37] Individual song numbers were not particularly memorable, but the producers were able to create the illusion of larger and more varied environments than were actually possible to film in the confined space of the studio. Spectators took particular pleasure in the inclusion of interviews with stars of the Bologna football club by famed sportscasters Niccolò Carosio and Vittorio Veltroni. The restaurant setting, in addition to creating opportunities for comic relief in the form of toasts and antics performed by the customers, also gestured to the origins of the variety show in the French *cafe-chantant*, adopted as the *caffé-concerto* by Italians at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[38] *Al cavallino baio* was also the only program to include an audience, albeit a fictional one, in the picture. Given the studio's limited space and the narrow spectrum of dramatic scenes it provided—elevators, hallways, offices—the inclusion of a viewing audience inside the frame of *Al cavallino baio* was remarkable, if only because it reinforced the relationship between watching theater and watching television for those viewers at the Villaggio Balneare pavilion and clustered outside windows along the Via del Corso. As many historians have pointed out, the conceptual linkage between early television and the theater was central to distinguishing television from film. Historian Lynn Spigel has argued: "Whereas film allowed spectators imaginatively to project themselves into a scene, television would give people the sense of being on the scene of presentation—it would simulate the entire experience of being at the theatre." By thematizing *watching*—framing the audience within the image—the program highlighted television's primary advantage over radio: it could bring the whole theater, from radio stars to their audience, into the viewer's home.

The experiments with television that immediately followed the 1939 broadcasts to Rome's Villaggio Balneare gradually loosened the medium's

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[37] *Al cavallino baio* also featured the first television appearance of an Italian soccer team, the Bologna Football Club interviewed by popular radio sportscasters Nicolò Carosio and Vittorio Veltroni; "Televisione in Italia," *L'Antenna*, August 31, 1939, 470.

[38] Massimo Scaglione, *Saluti e Baci* (Turin: La Stampa, 2001).

ties with the discourse of autarchy and, indeed, with fascist rhetoric and iconography. While these subsequent broadcasts were also designed to promote Italian-made products and technologies, the new broadcast sites freed both the camera and the spectator from the confines of the studio, multiplying and confounding the lines of sight and power between viewer and filmed subject. After the conclusion of the Rome broadcasts, in September 1939, EIAR initiated two weeks of television transmissions from Milan as part of the nearby Mostra Nazionale della Radio. The site for the broadcasts was the Torre Littoria, located in the center of the city's main park, Parco Sempione. Inaugurated in 1933 and named for the *fascio littorio* (the symbol of the Fascist party), the Torre Littoria represented the regime's commitment to modern architecture and urban transformation in the city where fascism was born. During the Milan broadcasts, receivers set inside the fairgrounds, in the famed Galleria di Milano and along Corso Buenos Aires attracted substantial crowds, while the same signal was picked up more than fifty kilometers away in the towns of Novara and Biella.[39] Every day from 18:00 to18:45 and 21:00 to 21:45 in the Magneti Marelli studio, two kinds of receivers produced by the Milan-based company—including a tabletop version—displayed broadcasts for attendees of the exposition.[40]

Daily broadcasting, again sponsored by Magneti Marelli, returned to Milan the following April on the occasion of the twenty-first Fiera Campionaria. These broadcasts marketed the new Italian-produced television receivers and radios through daily programs with a decidedly international flair, featuring Spanish dancers, "Indo-Brazilian" guitar and traditional Japanese folksong. Reviews of performances by Abigaille Parecis (Brazil), Ascensiòn Gimenez Alvarez (Spain), and Atsuko Ito (Japan) emphasized the "picturesque national costumes" donned by the singers in addition to the national character of their dances and repertoire, performed in their native languages.[41] Foreign artists for the Milan broadcasts were thus differentiated both visually and sonically from Italian singers of *musica leggera*, who performed songs by American composers with lyrics translated into Italian. Unlike the Villaggio Balneare, the Fiera Campionaria was not explicitly marked as a fascist space—instead, even at the height of the

[39] "La Radiovisione alla Fiera di Milano," *Radiocorriere*, May 5–11, 1940, 11.
40. "Il nuovo palazzo dell'EIAR in Corso Sempione," *Corriere della Sera*, July 21, 1939, 6.
[41] Camillo Boscia, "La Radiovisione alla Fiera di Milano," *Radiocorriere*, May 5–11, 1940, 11.

regime's autarchical policy it served as a site for international cultural and economic exchange, featuring booths from artisans and producers from many other European nations.[42] While the broadcasts' international imagery may have mirrored the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Fiera Campionaria at large, they certainly contrasted with the viewing studio in which the audience found themselves, which had been specifically designed to market the superiority of Italian products.[43]

During the Milan broadcasts, for the first time cameras were used outdoors, where they toured the paths of Parco Sempione, interviewing attendees at the fair and transmitting those interviews to viewers in the studio and throughout the city between concerts and screenings of LUCE videos. These programs had two radical effects: first, in moving the camera beyond the four walls of the studio, they vastly expanded the space limitations that had hindered TV broadcasts only months before; and second, in transmitting the images and speech of attendees to the Fiera they effectively concluded the process started by *Al cavallino baio* of representing the audience to itself. Unlike that of *Al cavallino baio*, however, the audience members represented were not watching, but speaking; no longer consuming, but producing the medium that would be consumed. On-location radio broadcasting had been the norm for nearly a decade, but the purpose was largely to locate the listener within the auditory space of the theater or stadium. In this case, however, the cameras capturing the crowds at the Fiera Campionaria were instead engaged in endowing the broadcast with an undeniable proof of liveness. By positioning the subject in the frame, directing the camera's "eye" to their image, the transmission necessarily differentiated between two entities—the subject in front of the camera, and the cameraman/viewer "behind" it. For the audience in the viewing room, on-location transmissions outside the viewing studio were thus marked as both immediate and mediated—not smoothing over traces of the medium, but deliberately highlighting them in an effort to interpellate the audience-as-viewers.

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[42] The number of booths selling radios at the Fiera Campionaria more than doubled during the 1930s, reaching its height after 1935. Emilio Colombo, Luca Mocarelli and Luca Matteo Stanca, *Il ruolo della Fiera di Milano nell'economia italiana* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 65.

[43] As many commentators highlighted, Magneti Marelli was the first Italian corporation to offer a series of receivers "of entirely Italian production." On this topic, see F. Casetti et al., *Per una bibliografia sulla televisione in Italia dal 1928 al 1942. Ricerche Anno Accademico 1976–1977* (Milan: Fondazione Rizzoli, 1977).

The success of this tactic depended on whether the television could successfully construct a sufficiently intimate connection between the audience pictured on the screen and the one gathered in the viewing room, a participatory circuit that Marshall McLuhan called "profoundly kinetic and tactile."[44] Yet instead of watching alone from their living rooms and kitchens, the spectators crowding EIAR's television viewing studios and storefronts represented a collective audience gathered for a public spectacle. Could such an audience truly experience a connection of the kind McLuhan described? In contrast to radio and film, McLuhan classified television as a "cool medium," one that required active participation by the viewer. He argued that early television's pixelated, blurry image quality in particular invited the listener to "complete" the image. For Raymond Williams, the participatory nature of the television experience was instead characterized by "planned flow," which defined not only the institutional organization of broadcasting but also the experience of its consumption. Without conceding too much to either McLuhan's positivism or Williams's far-reaching claims, it is worth noting that, for all their differences, both theorists were deeply concerned with determining how television produced a combination of liveness and intimacy. These characteristics, first associated with radio, were not intrinsic to the medium but created by a teleological historical model (one claimed by both historical actors and the theorists who followed) that viewed television as the natural successor to radio's place in the home. The private, domestic model of television fails to account for either the way audiences consumed EIAR's experimental broadcasts, or the physical circumstances of their consumption.

The conditions of the television viewing room—public, crowded, and contained within a building marked by the name and autarchical policy of the Duce—should make us keenly aware of the ontological difference between the recorded images and sound and the live audience crowding in front of it, a division that contradicts the overt claims to liveness and presence articulated regularly by both engineers and viewers alike.[45]

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[44] McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: Signet Books, 1964), 273.

[45] Carolyn Abbate has argued that we should "pay attention to historical conditions of production and experience, thus soliciting attention for their event character." In the case of the experimental broadcasts, such an approach would lead us to notice, for example, that the experience of individual viewers in the crowded room, each battling for the best possible angle to see the screen, may have impeded their ability to distinguish even such details of programming as are described in this article. Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," *Journal of the American Musicological*

Whether the public nature of the spectacle would have drastically altered the "liveness" or "intimacy" of the viewing experience is not the point. For, as we have seen, both radio producers and journalists claimed television as a domestic medium, one that could transmit both images and sound—and, in particular, the image and voice of the Duce—into the viewer's home. It is important, nevertheless, to pay attention to ways in which EIAR's experimental broadcasts shaped the circumstances of early television reception in Italy to a degree that would resonate in future narratives of Italian technological success or failure. In arguing for the benefits of "format theory," Jonathan Sterne has exhorted us to be aware of the "changing formations of media, the contexts of their reception, the conjunctures that shaped their sensual characteristics, and the institutional politics in which they were enmeshed."[46] Writing about the emergence of radio and television—both of which undeniably marked significant cultural shifts across the globe—requires us to specify particular characteristics of time, space, political context, and relationship to the consumer in order to understand "the stuff beneath, beyond, and behind the boxes our media come in."[47] This is particularly true of media failures, characterized by moments of mismatch between expectation and reality, and visible only with the benefit of hindsight. And it is even more imperative for histories of fascism to be aware, not only of how fascist industries and organizations articulated their own aims and motivations, but how those political and aesthetic goals unfolded in practice, and often in contradictory ways.

Moreover, directing our attention to the Villaggio Balneare and, in particular, to the broadcast pavilion, serves to highlight contradictions between the content of the broadcasts and the contexts of their reception. If the goal of television during fascism was to bring the moving, speaking, gesturing image of the Duce into every Italian's home, then EIAR's broadcasts were incontrovertible failures, limited as they were by both technological and commercial constraints, and eventually by the beginning of the war. Before declaring the case closed, however, we must look more closely at how the broadcasts' reception was framed both spatially (by the exhibition space) and rhetorically (through advertisements). The content of the broadcasts may have focused on television's improvements to the radio

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Society 69 (2016), 821.

[46] Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 11.

[47] Sterne, *MP3*, 11.

medium, but the spatial framing served to remind viewers of the political party that made that improvement possible. The writing on the wall—"Mussolini is always right" and "AUTARCHY"—labeled the televised content, the devices, and even the building in which they were consumed as products of Italian fascist policy and ingenuity. That the work of politicizing the broadcasts was performed spatially rather than through programming should tell us that early television was not necessarily understood, even by the most ardent supporters of fascism, to be the ideal medium for reaching citizens in their homes and developing an intimate relationship between the dictator and the people, in part because radio had shown itself to be highly successful in that regard. Nor was it merely another example of Italian success on a global scale housed in the pavilion, on par with the pyrite, zinc and aluminum featured at the Mostra Autarchica del Minerale Italiano (MAMI) exhibition the year before. Rather, it was both of these, but more importantly, *radiovisione* produced a relationship with its viewers that was simultaneously immediate and mediated, simultaneous and enduring, contained within and yet far bigger than the screen it was projected through.

The End and the Beginning of an Era

The media-historical narrative that claimed radio as the prototype and television as the solution to radio's most pressing challenge constructed an evolutionary logic, one that mirrored fascism's own self-representation of its antecedents in ancient Rome. Both discourses are easily discerned in the promotion and execution of EIAR's experimental broadcasts, which staged fascism as by turns ancient and modern, cosmopolitan and self-reliant. Even before the conclusion of EIAR's experimental transmissions, advocates calling for a national television network began proclaiming the political potential of the new medium, looking forward to the upcoming World's Fair in Rome as an opportunity for fascism to showcase its technological prowess through a state-of-the-art television and radio exhibition.[48] Like the neighborhood south of Rome nicknamed EUR (Esposizione Universale Roma), for which construction had already begun, these exhibitions would serve as proof to the world that Italy had emerged from the dark ages and was more than ready to take its place alongside other modern,

[48] "Progetto di massima per il Palazzo della Radio e della TV all'Esposizione Universale di Roma," *Radio e Televisione* 4, no. 1 (Sept. 1939), 61–81.

technologically advanced nations.[49] To the extent that EIAR's early broadcasting attempts have received attention from scholars, this has been understood as the primary, if not the only, motivation for the network to undertake television broadcasting—television's potential to raise Italy's status on the world stage.[50] Because EIAR's television experiments ceased upon Italy's entry into World War II, such a narrative suggests an abortive ending to what had been a straightforwardly nationalist project. A closer examination of the transmissions leaves us, however, with a much more complicated—and lingering—sense of the importance of EIAR's experiments, both as a reflection of fascist national policies and as a harbinger of the efforts that would be undertaken by RAI, the network's successor, a decade later.

During the 1930s, EIAR undertook multiple unambiguously political efforts to reinforce the regime's autarchical policies. Throughout their television experiments, EIAR advocated the production and sale of Italian technologies and the consumption of national culture, much (though not all) of which took on an increasingly nationalistic, pro-fascist political stance as Italy's entry into the Second World War approached. The call for autarchy so flagrantly emblazoned on the front of the broadcast pavilion was echoed in the television viewing chambers of both the Villaggio Balneare and the Milan viewing studio, but the network's involvement in and support for Mussolini's call for self-sufficiency was already old news. Articles in the *Radiocorriere* and regular on-air lectures composed by members of the Accademia d'Italia framed the policy as an opportunity for Italy to demonstrate its national worth to foreign forces that had dismissed it for decades.[51] But radio had already served as far more than just a platform for advertising the regime's efforts—EIAR, SAFAR, and other radio

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[49] Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001); and Irene Piazzoni, *Storia delle televisioni in Italia: Dagli esordi alle web tv* (Rome: Carocci, 2014).

[50] See Aldo Grasso, *Radio e televisione: teorie, analisi, storie, esercizi* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000); and his *Storia della televisione italiana* (Milan: Garzanti, 2004). According to Grasso, one of the foremost historians of Italian television, EIAR's experimental broadcasts functioned as a largely fruitless attempt to harness technologies that would not be truly put to public use until 1952, on the occasion of the first Italian-produced "telegiornali," or TV news programs.

[51] Francesco Giordani, "La battaglia per l'autarchia," *Radiocorriere*, Dec. 5–11, 1937, 1.; Amedeo Giannini, "Il decalogo dell'autarchia," *Radiocorriere,* December 10–16, 1939, 1.

manufacturers were active partners in promoting and facilitating autarchical policies.

Television's genesis in radio broadcasting is regularly framed in scholarship as the result of an addition—in this framing, television "fixed" radio by reincorporating its "lost" images. As we have seen, such a narrative lay at the heart of EIAR's marketing of its own experimental broadcasts (recall the advertisement that promised viewers moving images of the stars whom, until recently, they had seen only in print photographs). Yet even as EIAR used the radio to draw audience interest to their television broadcasts, the same broadcasts served to sell receivers and EIAR programs to the nation. Live performances by radio personalities undertaken in the auditorium of the MAMI pavilion were only one way the network advertised their services through the medium of the small screen. New television receivers drew consumer attention to the many nationally produced radio receiver brands. Two years before EIAR's experimental broadcasts, at the ninth Mostra Nazionale della Radio, SAFAR promoted their "ricevitore radio-fono-visivo" alongside more traditional radio receivers with the assertion that "SAFAR's scientific laboratories are unique in Italy, and they have granted the nation self-sufficiency [*l'autarchia*] in the realm of radio-electro-acoustics."[52] Increased consumership on the national level, it seemed, was one benefit of autarchical policies, although the devices advertised at the Mostra were also distributed abroad to international markets.[53] While the intersection of fascist policy with corporate profit is hardly surprising, it is worth remembering that EIAR's television experiments served as much to advertise the radio as they did to fulfill and "reform" the medium's lack of image.

The network's final attempt at television broadcasting came after the war had begun, on 17 September 1941, on the occasion of a visit to EIAR's Rome studio by Josip Milković, one of the heads of Ustasha-Croatian Revolutionary Movement. To celebrate Milković's visit, Maestro Armando La Rosa Parodi conducted EIAR's symphonic orchestra and choir in a concert of music by Italian masters including Gioachino Rossini, Arrigo Boito,

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[52] "La SAFAR alla IX Mostra Radio Milano," *Radiocorriere,* October 3–9, 1937, 4.
[53] "La IX Mostra della Radio," *Radiocorriere,* September 26–October 6, 1937, 7. EIAR was also a prominent presence at the 1938 Mostra dell'Autarchia in Turin, which boasted, among other displays, a life-size photo of Mussolini speaking into a microphone; see "L'EIAR alla Mostra dell'Autarchia," *Radiocorriere,* October 30–November 5, 1938, 7.

Francesco Cilea, and Riccardo Zandonai, concluding the first half with a full-chorus rendition of the "Hymn to the Sun" from Pietro Mascagni's opera *Iris*. After a brief intermission, the august visitors were ushered into a second room, where they were surprised by a demonstration of radio-vision starring singers Fernanda Barbareschi and Velleda Tranquilli, recorded live from the studio next door. The evening concluded with a variety performance, also televised, starring the most popular EIAR performers, including the Quartetto Cetra and the Orchestra da Ballo conducted by Cinico Angelini.[54] Unlike EIAR's earlier experimental broadcasts, this transmission was not open to the public. Instead, television was merely one more performer charged with entertaining Milković and other fascist officials. In many respects, the performance narrated a history of Italian music and media, beginning with the great works of Italian opera, a section that featured the fascist period's most successful opera composer, Mascagni, before tracing the advancement of popular music and Italian jazz. Seen in this light, EIAR's television demonstration seems nothing more than an intermezzo, an amusing distraction designed for those viewers who already understood the narrative of progress embedded in the program.

Television would not achieve a dominant place in the Italian home until well after the beginning of nationwide broadcasting by EIAR's successor, RAI, in 1954.[55] This was due not only to the high cost of television sets (approximately 200,000 lire), which was out of the reach of most Italians during the post-war recovery period, but also to the annual licensing fee of 15,000 lire. With an average national income of 250,000 lire in the 1950s, only upper-class Italians could afford the expense.[56] Not until the early 1960s

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[54] "La Missione Croata guidata dall'Ecc. Milkovic visita le principali sedi ed i maggiori impianti dell'Eiar," *Radiocorriere,* Sept. 28–Oct. 4, 1941, 5. The spectacle was described by Virgilio Savona, one of the members of the Quartetto Cetra, in his memoir. See Virgilio Savona, *Gli Indimenticabili Cetra* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 1992), 55.

[55] By the end of 1939, Italian radio subscribers numbered 1,170,000, while still more listened to radio broadcasts in classrooms and community centers across the country. The increase in listenership was due in part to projects like Radio Rurale, which sought to expand EIAR's rural listener base. For a detailed description of the network's efforts to improve subscription numbers, see Philip Cannistraro, "The Radio in Fascist Italy," *Journal of European Studies* 2 (1972), 127–54.

[56] Rather than purchasing their own televisions, many viewers chose to watch in public venues including bars and community centers, particularly as the popularity of shows like *Lascia o raddoppia?* grew. See Emma Barron, *Popular High Culture in*

would Italian television become a truly domestic medium, with 75 percent of viewers watching from home in 1966, compared to 36 percent in 1959.[57] Even then, the early decades of national television were marked by a distinct character of commercialism and spectacle, from the popular quiz show *Lascia o raddoppia?* to the first televised broadcast of the Sanremo Music Festival in 1955.[58] In the 1960s and 1970s, TV would also play a major role in the revisionist discourse surrounding Mussolini and fascism through often-controversial documentaries.[59] While in 1939 the medium was far from being able to realize the ambitions of EIAR producers, it is nevertheless tempting to draw connections between the political value television seemed to offer in 1939 and later efforts by RAI and, eventually, Silvio Berlusconi's media empire to use it to disseminate politicized messages. Even beyond the public broadcasting institution, the conceptual link between television, the medium of the people, and an evolutionary narrative of Italian progress endured through the end of the twentieth century. The incestuous ties between politics and Italian media came to a head with the election of Berlusconi as prime minister in 1994. The leader of the vast Mediaset empire, Berlusconi took advantage of television's reach as a political tool, and his critics clamored against the obvious conflicts of interest to no avail. Berlusconi served nine years as prime minister and to this day remains a leading figure in the center-right Italian political party. When Berlusconi was elected, Mediaset possessed a near monopoly on the private Italian television sector, and was the primary competitor of the publicly-funded RAI.[60]

Italian Media, 1950–1970 (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2018).

[57] Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 1992), 292.

[58] On commercialism in early Italian television, see Aldo Grasso, *Linea allo studio: Miti e riti della televisione italiana* (Milan: Bompiani, 1989); and Gianni Losito, "L'offerta di radio e televisione in Italia: Problemi e tendenze," in Mario Morcellini, ed., *Lo spettacolo del consumo. Televisione e cultura di massa nella legittimazione sociale* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986).

[59] See, for example, Robert Ventresca's discussion of the 1994 documentary *Combat Film* in "Mussolini's Ghost: Italy's Duce in History and Memory," *History and Memory* 18 (2006), 86–119; and Vanessa Roghi, "Mussolini and Post-War Italian Television," in *The Cult of the Duce: Mussolini and the Italians*, Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan, and Giuliana Pieri, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). On the construction of national victimhood, see Giovanni De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2011).

[60] For a concise description of the details of Berlusconi's conflict of interest

Berlusconi, like other celebrity political figures, campaigned on a populist platform and devoted enormous funds to running near-constant advertisements on his networks. One ad for his 2001 reelection campaign, the "official hymn" of the Popolo della Libertà titled "Meno male che Silvio c'è" [Thank God for Silvio], drew on familiar themes. The three-minute music video featured a series of ordinary citizens engaging in their everyday activities, from college professors and students to bakers, gelato servers, construction workers and taxi drivers. The primary melody, repeated ten times over the course of the video, featured a soloist singing "Siamo la gente della libertà" [We are the people of freedom], after which a crowd joined in for the final line of "Thank God for Silvio." It would be easy to poke fun at the video's production value and general absurdity, particularly those moments when the solo voice obviously fails to match up with the images of multiple people singing onscreen. The video's populist message was embedded in a disarming combination of clumsiness and extravagance. Berlusconi, the video claimed, was the kind of leader who could appeal equally to the individual and the masses, to the wealthy and the poor, bringing them together into a massive group all engaged in singing (literally) the prime minister's praises. Television (which, incidentally, Berlusconi controlled) was the tool that brought this ad— and these people— to the viewer. And it was television that showed them, rising behind the final jubilant chorus, the 1937 Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana. Also known as the Square Coliseum, this site would have been the centerpiece of the 1942 Esposizione Universale Roma, and as such would have likely housed EIAR's television demonstrations at the event had the war not interrupted their progress.

With this example, I do not intend either to trace a direct connection between Mussolini and Berlusconi or to suggest that Italian television remained in a suspended state for the entirety of the twentieth century. Rather, what this chapter has shown is that Italian television's unique relationship to politics was present from its beginnings in EIAR's television experiments, and in many respects continued long after the fall of the regime that fostered it. Moreover, that relationship depended on a series of technological transformations, beginning with the radio, which resulted in television being bound conceptually with Italian progress on an international scale and also, paradoxically, with its ancient history. In "Thank God for Silvio," the Square Coliseum stands as a silent reminder of the fascist

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controversies, see David Hine, "Silvio Berlusconi, the Media and the Conflict of Interest Issue," *Italian Politics* 17 (2001), 261–275.

regime's reclamation—and retelling—of ancient history. The monument's appearance in the video is a reminder that architectural monuments constructed during the fascist period continue to be revered with little or no attention paid to the problematic, and often violent, colonial history they represent.[61] Although less obvious about its provenance, Italian media similarly contains traces of the nationalist, autocratic, and occasionally contradictory policies of its birth under fascism. EIAR's experimental television broadcasts reveal the depth of early television's debt to radio broadcasting, and the ways in which conceptual models of what television could do drew upon existing political and programmatic frameworks previously developed for radio broadcasting. Perhaps most profoundly, they demonstrate that television's future dominance of the domestic sphere was not immediate, but rather the result of experimentation in the public arena. Endowed with the power to transmit images, Italian television developed into a medium capable of reflecting the audience back to itself, in the process shaping both reflection and viewer—but only after a series of missteps, misconceptions and compromises between viewers, producers, and the technologies that brought the small screen into vivid reality.

[61] On this topic, see Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Why Are So Many Fascist Monuments Still Standing in Italy?" *The New Yorker,* October 5, 2017.

Afterword

The airwaves would prove a key battleground during the Second World War. When Allied Forces bombed Turin on December 8 and 9, 1942, among their key targets were the central headquarters and studios of EIAR, including the network's symphony complex at the historic Teatro Scribe. The musical ensembles once housed in the theater moved to Florence, where they began broadcasting from an affiliated station. EIAR and CETRA reestablished their studios in Turin at the end of the following year; by that time, however, the nation was split between Allied-occupied southern Italy and the Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI), often referred to as the Republic of Salò, established by German forces in the northern half of the peninsula. Allied forces controlled EIAR's transmitters in Palermo (seized on August 6, 1943), Bari (September 23, 1943), and Naples (October 14, 1943). Once seized, the stations transmitted broadcasts prepared by the Armed Forces Radio Service, established by the United States War Department in May 1942 in order to provide entertainment to soldiers and counteract the propaganda being broadcast by the RSI via EIAR stations in Turin, Florence, and Milan.[1] Other stations, including Radio Londra, continued to broadcast both alternative news on the ongoing conflict and entertainment.[2] Italians in the German-occupied North listened to foreign stations despite the threat of fines or imprisonment, while listeners in southern Italy continued to tune into EIAR stations and, after 1944, to Radio Tevere, Mussolini's own short-lived radio station, which broadcast primarily Italian jazz through the final months of the war.[3]

The above paragraph represents a very condensed summary of the

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[1] See Anna Celenza, *Jazz Italian Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 158–161; and Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001), 142–194.

[2] Of these stations, by far the most attention has been paid in scholarship to the impact of Radio Londra. See Ester Lo Biundo, *London calling Italy. La propaganda di Radio Londra nel 1943* (Milan: Unicopli, 2014); Mario Bussoni, *Radio Londra: Voci dalla Liberta* (Parma: Mattioli Edizioni, 2018); and Stefano Gagliarducci, Massimiliano Gaetano Onorato, Francesco Sobbrio, and Guido Tabellini, "War of the Waves: Radio and Resistance during World War II," *SSRN* (October 1, 2019).

[3] For more on Italians listening to foreign stations during the war, see Gianni Isola, "Il microfono conteso. La guerra delle onde nella lotta di liberazione nazionale (1943–1945)," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Méditerranée* 108, no. 1 (1996), 83–124.

many ways that radio shaped both the daily experiences of Italians and the large-scale plans of nations during the five years of Italy's involvement in the Second World War. The transition from EIAR to RAI following the war, and the subsequent decades of reforming, retelling and reframing the history of Italian radio, continue to inform how we understand the relationship between the medium and the fascist regime. Nevertheless, historians of both periods often conceive of an artificial rupture between the fascist *ventennio* and the events and people that preceded and followed it. For studies of radio in particular, the conceptual rift is in some ways justified, due the way that EIAR functioned in part as a mouthpiece for the regime and its policies. There is much work left to do, however, to illuminate the many connections between radio during and radio after fascism; to show that the one did not necessarily radically diverge from the other, but rather that the political, cultural, and social infrastructures constructed during fascism remained in place and continued to shape Italian broadcasting for decades to come. This dissertation's final chapter gestures towards such a conclusion; but in what follows, I want to reflect on what stories remain to be told, ending less with a sign-off than with a slow fade.

This dissertation has examined broadcasts from a period of roughly fifteen years, about three-quarters of the duration of Mussolini's regime. Its subtitle, "Music and Media in Fascist Italy," reflects a fundamentally open narrative. Rather than concluding with EIAR's experimental television broadcasts, the dénouement could have traced any number of paths: EIAR's regular broadcasts of music to troops in North Africa and Sicily during the war or the 1944 broadcasts of Mussolini's "Radio Tevere," each of which began with Giacomo Puccini's "Inno a Roma"—or it could have pushed farther into the future, to consider the first Esposizione Internazionale di Televisione in 1949, where viewers crowded to see images broadcast from the same street where EIAR studios had been decimated by bombings.[4] In many ways, the events narrated in these pages are merely the beginning of the story. Like the fascist monuments still standing in Rome, radio maintained a link between the public and private lives of Italians long after the war. And like the Square Coliseum, it has been largely cleansed of any memory of its once close ties to fascism. When we do recall the connection between fascism and radio, it is often in the context of outright propaganda, to the point that the term has become an epithet we apply to any political discourse with which we disagree. What I hope this dissertation has shown is that

[4] Celenza, *Jazz Italian Style*, 70.

radio broadcasts during fascism were always political, whether they transmitted a speech by Mussolini or an opera at La Scala. Without fail, these broadcasts not only communicated but also generated fascist ideas and discourse, constructing in turn fantasies of statist control and vernacular resistance. We cannot understand either fascism's historical role or its lingering presence in Italian politics and culture without understanding the ways in which it was mediated by and through radio.

Beyond examining the content that producers developed for radio in these early decades, I have tried to understand the ways in which broadcasts allowed, or even encouraged, listeners to comment on the dominant political discourse while engaging in playful and experimental ways with the emerging medium. Fascist radio did not erupt from the sky with a dull roar of propaganda and a built-in audience of silent, passive listeners. It took time for the medium to develop the particular contours of institutional organization and aesthetic principles that distinguished Italian radio of this period. During this time, the medium offered a great deal of freedom for both listeners and producers to imagine what Italian radio could be. By the end of the 1930s, such playful experimentation had largely stopped. By then radio had taken on the form and function that it has largely continued to occupy up to the present, as a medium for tuning in to music, news, sports, and theater from the comfort of one's home. This does not mean that experiments in writing for radio ceased—RAI's *Studio di fonologia musicale*, for example, would continue to produce experimental musical works by Luciano Berio, Bruno Maderna, and Luigi Nono, and others.[5] But by the time of Italy's entrance into World War II, Italian radio had reached a moment of closure, in the sense that both producers and listeners accepted the medium's claims to immediacy, simultaneity, and accuracy as truth.[6] We can see this in the articles and letters published in magazines like *Radiocorriere*

[5] See Angela Ida de Benedictis, *Nuova Musica alla Radio. Esperienze allo Studio di Fonologia della RAI di Milano 1954–1959* (Rome: ERI-RAI, 2000); and Delia Casadei, "Milan's Studio di Fonologia: Voice Politics in the City, 1955–8," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* (2016), 403–443.

[6] In the field of science and technology studies, Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker have provided a key approach that documents the way social groups shape the development of technology. Pinch and Bijker argue that emerging technologies go through a period of interpretive flexibility, followed by periods of closure and stabilization. See their "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology might Benefit Each Other," *Social Studies of Science* (1984), 399–441.

and *L'Antenna*, which framed television as the new media frontier while radio had crystallized into a "plastic" medium, one that offered a "window into the world."[7] This is not to say that the medium did not stubbornly intercede at critical moments: when the Nazis briefly occupied the network's Rome studio at Via Asiago, causing all EIAR programs to cease for a period of two days, listeners heard only a repetitive succession of classical music, which Enzo Forcella observed "produced an effect of *black out* as distressing and destabilizing as absolute silence."[8]

In addition to its temporal boundaries, this project has limited its geographical purview to the borders of the Italian state, focusing almost exclusively on Italians listening to Italian radio in Italy. The decision to do so was in many ways a practical one, given that radio in Italy was, from the beginning, a national endeavor. In this it resembles national broadcasting systems developed throughout Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, and differs somewhat from the commercial system that arose in the United States. Throughout the writing process, however, I have been keenly aware that the physical boundaries constructed by terms like "national broadcasting" are largely fictional, for several reasons. First, as I have stressed more than once, radio waves do not magically stop at the border between one nation and the next: listeners from Italy were tuning in to stations from abroad even during the war, when the government threatened them with fines or imprisonment.[9] The other, perhaps less obvious, reason has to do with the mutability of the very concept of "the nation." Throughout the period covered by this study, what it meant to be Italian was under constant debate. For Mussolini and many other fascists, the Italian nation exceeded its physical borders to encompass the hearts and souls of those Italians living abroad. Radio broadcasts during the period under discussion sought to forge deeper ties within these satellite communities of the Italian nation, and

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[7] The quotes are drawn from an interview with the journalist and writer Arnaldo Fraccaroli; "Arnaldo Fraccaroli, Radioascoltatore," *Radiocorriere,* Dec. 23–29, 1934, 10. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment of transition; however, between 1934 and 1935 there is a marked decrease in what might be called "mystical" language surrounding radio broadcasting. At the same time, an increased number of technical articles on television broadcasting appear during this period in both *Radiocorriere* and magazines geared towards a more professional audience.

[8] Enzo Forcella, "L'arte della fuga: Il blackout dell'informazione nella crisi italiana dell'8 settembre," *Movimento operaio e socialista* (1983). Cited in Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia*, 158.

[9] Isola, "Il Microfono Conteso."

Italians living elsewhere in Europe, the United States, and Latin America regularly wrote in to express their appreciation for EIAR programming.[10] There is a great deal of work still to be done on how radio contributed to the development of a transatlantic network of fascists abroad, which subsequently paved the way for fascist ideologies to spring up outside mainland Italy decades after Mussolini's death.[11] My hope is that the research and interpretation presented here provides a baseline for this future work by revealing how technological innovation, institutional and economic structures, and cultural programming worked to establish radio as the ideal medium for incorporating listeners into a fascist collectivity.

In January of 1930, in the same issue that featured the initial address of EIAR's new vice president, Arnaldo Mussolini, *Radiocorriere* published an interview with the acclaimed opera composer Pietro Mascagni. Besides affirming his "true enthusiasm" for radio in the interview, Mascagni narrated a personal encounter with the medium. While visiting one of EIAR's studios in Rome, Mascagni asked the engineers to leave him alone in the studio. Once there, he initiated a transmission of the famed intermezzo from his opera *Cavalleria rusticana*: "Over the speaker unfolded the sounds that I launched on the ethereal highways. I seemed to recreate my own music: an 'intermezzo' such as I had never heard before." The experience, Mascagni claimed, had convinced him that radio "must not merely reproduce, but should improve music, giving rise to new possibilities for art."[12] Mascagni's vision of his own intermezzo, newly-composed over radio, echoing through the ether to resonate over city squares throughout the nation, synthesized the possibilities both producers and listeners envisioned for the new medium on both aesthetic and political grounds. Music and culture lay at the heart of fascism's plans for radio. The first decades of broadcasting in Italy produced a delicate synergy between art and politics, one that would continue to characterize Italian broadcasting long after the fall of the fascist regime. In order to grasp what came after—the transition to RAI, the creation of Berlusconi's media empire—we must understand how the early, experimental decades shaped what radio was and could be.

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[10] See, for example, "Letter d'ascoltatori" in *Radiocorriere*, April 23, 1927, 8, which featured letters from listeners in Moscow, Santa Cruz de la Palma, and Munich.
[11] Over the last decade, transatlantic approaches to studying Italian fascism have revealed the many avenues by which fascist discourse circulated globally. See, for example, Frederico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[12] "Parlando con Pietro Mascagni," *Radiocorriere*, Jan. 5–11, 1930, 1.

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