

# RADIO THEATRE IN ITALY. STORYTELLING BETWEEN PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING AND NEW DIGITAL SPACES

RADIOTEATRO EN ITALIA. NARRATIVA ENTRE LA RADIODIFUSIÓN PÚBLICA  
Y LOS NUEVOS ESPACIOS DIGITALES

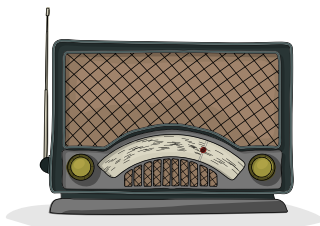
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**Abstract.** This paper analyzes Italian radio theatre evolution and its ability to put itself always in the middle between radio and other expressive media: theatre, cinema, comics, daily news, books and Internet. Starting from the analysis of the main evolutionary phases of this complex radio genre, this contribution illustrates the complexity of radio theatre as one of the treasures brought to light by media archeology, which lends itself almost naturally to disciplinary and media crossings. In this expressive format, belonging to media proto history, lurks a deeply complex nature and fervent creativity, which rediscovers in the ether an amplifier of the digital, a new space of expressiveness and diversification of its audience. **Keywords:** Radio Theatre; Media Narratives; Social Cohesion; Innovation; Creativity; Digital Renaissance.

*Who commands the story is not the voice: it is the ear.*

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 1972

**Resumen.** Este artículo analiza la evolución del radioteatro italiano y su habilidad para posicionarse siempre entre la radio y otros formatos expresivos: teatro, cine, cómics, noticias de actualidad, libros e Internet. Partiendo del análisis de las principales fases de este complejo género radiofónico, esta aportación ilustra la complejidad del radioteatro como uno de los tesoros que salen a la luz a través de la arqueología de los medios, que contribuye de forma natural al cruce entre disciplinas y medios. En esta forma expresiva, que se atribuye a la protohistoria de los medios de comunicación, se encuentra una profunda, compleja y ferviente creatividad, que redescubre en el espectro un amplificador de lo digital, un nuevo espacio de expresividad y una diversificación de su público. **Palabras clave:** radioteatro; medios narrativos; cohesión social; innovación; creatividad; renacimiento digital.

### **1. Introduction, Research Hypothesis and Methodology**

Lending itself almost naturally to inter-disciplinary and media crossovers, radio drama represents one of the many treasures brought to light by media archaeology. In the rediscovery of a new space of expression in digital amplification, this expressive form, attributable to the protohistory of the media, reveals both a deeply complex nature and fervent creativity. Starting from the analysis of the origins and the main transformations of radio drama in Italy, this contribution focuses on the interpretative shaping function of radio in relation to content, often inspired by literature, comics, cinema, TV fiction and even news, and how this shaping subsequently finds space in the programming schedules of the main national radio stations. An example could be that of instant-stories, such as the ten-episode radio-fiction *102 Minutes at Ground Zero. The Latest Items from the Twin Towers*, created immediately after the dramatic events of 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2001. This research, based on the analysis of the main developments and media crossovers of radio drama, aims to outline a possible future for such content: from reuse and the attribution of economic value by multinationals as Amazon to a digital renaissance by revival enthusiasts, as well as the transdisciplinary training function that radio drama could offer schools and universities.

Welcomed enthusiastically by the public but with some skepticism by the critics, radio drama was first introduced in Italy on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1927 with the programme *Friday 13* (1928), a story by Mario Vugliano written for the radio by Gigi Michelotti (*Radiorario*, Italian Radio Union official magazine). Regardless the vocabulary used in theatrical adaptations, whether radio drama or fiction scripts, while inspired by theatrical tradition, they significantly reflect what we may call “radio specifications”: sound expression (voices, music, noises) that replace the image in portraying action. Despite radio drama’s strong potential identity value and the ability to cater to audiences such as the blind, as well as its educational function towards minors, over recent years this genre has been almost completely abandoned by Radio Rai (with the partial exception of Radio 3) and has been limited, above all, to an important part of the public service archives.

The advent of digital publishing, however, has reversed this trend. Indeed, our hypothesis is that we are witnessing its renaissance, thanks to the enormous diffusion of the audiobook format; specialized channels are increasingly emerging, such as the children's radio channel Radio Kids Rai, which offers many radio versions for children. Radio drama archaeologies are often entrusted to enthusiasts, who

guarantee a “long tail” (Anderson, 2004) of this content, making information and podcasts available on *ad hoc* sites and promoting a revival through sound environment social media sites. In addition to the latter there is an international trend in the use of radio drama because of its strong educational and socializing potential (that is fundamental for interdisciplinary team building) and its intrinsic therapeutic value.

To address this issue a dual approach has been chosen. On the one hand, the investigation explores the historical dimension with the aim of shedding light on what is currently hidden from users and media scholars. This has been achieved through the analysis of direct and indirect sources (bibliographic materials, magazines and newspapers of the historical periods considered, audiovisual archives materials) typical of the study direction known as the “archaeology of the media” (Zielinski, 2008; Erkki and Parikka, 2011; Parikka 2012). On the other hand, secondary data available at national and international level was analyzed. This was considered useful, above all, to identify the possible future of radio drama understood as a transmedia genre, calling for transdisciplinary study, research and application perspectives.

## **2. Radio in Italy. Between crisis and new renaissance**

When talking about radio drama in Italy we need start by locating radio itself in the context of the other cultural and entertainment industries. Once television had been introduced in Italy<sup>1</sup>, radio was considered as a sort of *Cinderella*. Nevertheless, it should be noted that radio has always managed to enjoy significant appreciation, especially in terms of its reputation and public trust. Recently, however, Italian radio has also had to deal with the problem of the reliability of audience measurement systems.

The issue of audience surveys has been ongoing for years, with a heated controversy around data and methods of detection: the previous Audiradio system concluded its surveys in 2011 and monitoring was entrusted to Radiomonitor, a service proposed by the GfKEurisko research institute. In 2017 survey monitoring was transferred to Ter (Tavolo Editori Radio).

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<sup>1</sup> The official release date of television in Italy is 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1954, while Radio was introduced in 1923 through Mussolini's 1923 Regio Decreto No. 1067 which reserved exclusive rights to the government for managing State infrastructures and radio transmission networks. The possibility of operating in

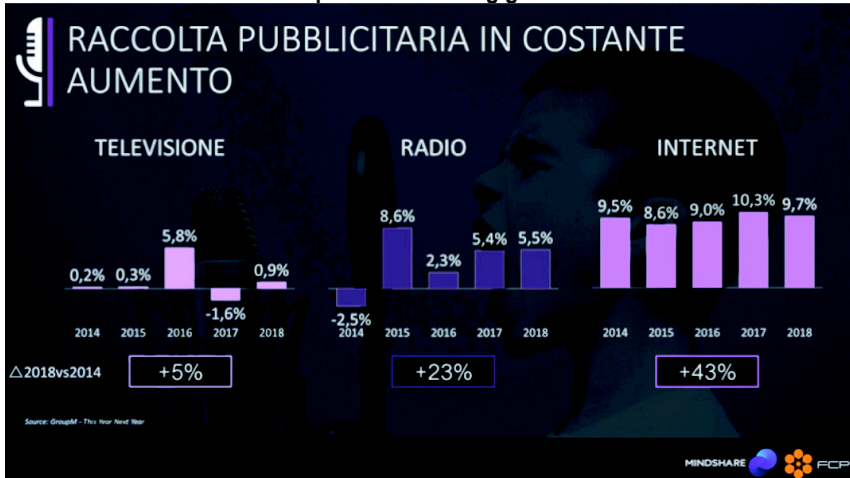
**Table 1. Italian Radio Audience Performance 2017 vs. 2018.**

Radio	1° semester 2018	1° semester 2017	Growth
RTL 102.5	7.559.000	8.483.000	-924.000
RDS	5.641.000	5.701.000	-60.000
Radio DeeJay	5.160.000	5.232.000	-72.000
Radio Italia	5.148.000	5.257.000	-109.000
Radio 105	4.744.000	4.952.000	-208.000
Radio Rai 1	3.784.000	3.930.000	-146.000
Radio Kiss Kiss	2.917.000	2.424.000	493.000
Radio Rai 2	2.670.000	2.699.000	-29.000
Virgin Radio	2.566.000	2.754.000	-188.000
Radio 24	2.197.000	2.144.000	53.000
R101	2.060.000	2.075.000	-15.000
M2o	1.598.000	1.750.000	-152.000
Radio Capital	1.554.000	1.644.000	-90.000
Radio Montecarlo	1.375.000	1.400.000	-25.000
Radio Rai 3	1.275.000	1.385.000	-110.000
Radio Freccia	990.000	667.000	323.000
Isoradio	790.000	910.000	-120.000
<b>Total audience</b>	<b>34.535.000</b>	<b>35.540.000</b>	<b>-1.005.000</b>

**Source: Radio TER 2017 and 2018.**

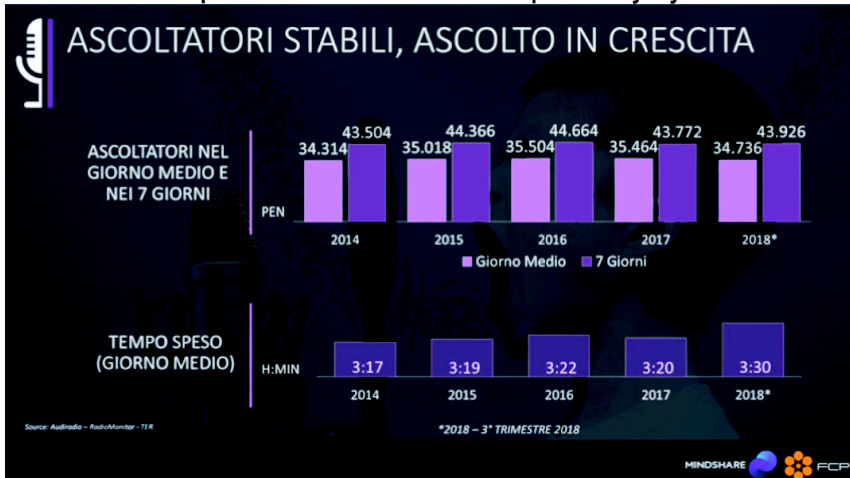
Despite the fluctuating health of the various Italian radios, research has shown an increase in advertising investments, due, among other reasons, to an increase in public's appreciation of the medium. Trust in radio is also evidenced by public "loyalty" as can be seen from the graphs which represent a steady growth in radio advertising between 2015 and 2017 (graph 1) and stable audience figures (graph 2).

Graph 1. Advertising growth.



Source: Group M 2018 (data in Italian).

Graph 2. Italian Radio Stations and public “loyalty”.



Source: Group M 2018 (data in Italian).

We are witnessing a sort of radio digital renaissance, which surely could be accompanied by a new appreciation trend of a genre typical of radio drama.

### **3. Radio Theatre Specificity. Beyond skepticism towards popularity**

On radio everything is evoked through word and sound: action develops, characters reveal themselves, atmospheres take shape. Space-time dimension of the action itself is defined by the presence or absence of words. Sounds, pauses and silences replace the absence of action, and the limited presence of characters on stage underlines their secondary role in carrying out the action. A simple “noise” may be sufficient to point out a change of scene (Arnheim, 1937: 121).

Artistic quality of radio fiction lies in the ability to present all the elements of narration in auditory values, ‘sound expressions’. In other words, rather than being hampered by the lack of visual images, the public's imaginative commitment becomes the strong point through the characterization of the radio as a “hot medium” by McLuhan is achieved (Arnheim, 1937 and 2003; Benjamin, 1971; Monteleone, 1992; Morcellini, 2005; Natale 1994; Motta, 2000).

The first obvious difference between theatre and radio theatre is the lack of public. The radio in its metaphysical propagating via ether erases the physicality of the scene and at the same time cancels the concrete existence of the listener.

The theatre lives in the warmth and vibrance that you create with the actor's immediate contact with the public. The actor conquers and dominates the public, dragging it through all the feelings —pleasure, grief, laughter, pain— the character he represents. [...] If you remove the public from the actor or the actor from the public you do not have theatre. Therefore, I rule out there might be a radio theatre (GIM, 1933).

Luigi Pirandello does not refrain from strongly criticizing radio too and its tendency to limit the expressive capabilities of theatre.

And radio, that should in any case be the bearer of art, relies on this skeleton to amuse its listeners and perhaps, with the pretense of making it more seductive by “adaptation for the microphone” defrauds it of some vertebrae and suppresses a tibia (GIM, 1934).

However, once this initial skepticism had been overcome, radio drama became a success.

The following become fundamental: a character cannot be revealed through behavior, facial expressions, or gestures, the choice of voices as “brand of identity”

of characters; regulation of voices (tones, modes and intensity) in relation to the development of situations, the concentration of different voice levels to indicate the disposition of characters in the scene and their involvement in the unfolding action; the expressive use of sounds (words, music, noise) and the silence to highlight the relevance and intensity of any given moment, to signal a shift between action phases, and to accompany the verbal action. The radio director therefore plays a fundamental role in radio drama production.

All that you need is the régisseur [...] a director of acute sensitivity who intuits the delicate technical and artistic nuances with which the microphone can serve that wonderful organ that is the human voice. Everything can be obtained from the voice. I say: everything. Even the visual part (Ferrieri, 1931: 382).

The specificity of radio productions lies in the fundamental importance of team effort, since only harmonious collaboration among its various professional figures can ensure its success: authors and directors (writing and treatment of the subject), actors (voices), technicians (the effectiveness of sounds and noises), managers and producers (working on the text, choosing the cast, etc.).

While all this remains valid for radio production in general, over time other components have also been added to the most popular productions, more commonly understood today as “scripted”: strong and compelling stories involving dialogues, simple language relevant to the characters and the historical era, and the identity of characters themselves. These are the core elements of a radio fiction.

The choice of intense and modulated voices, suggestive music, evocative sounds remains fundamental, but linguistic simplicity, dialogue rhythm and credibility, and the attraction and the popularity of the story are equally important. All these elements confirm the vocation of radio drama as a creative and cohesive encounter between professionals and languages (Perrini, 1953: 7-10).

#### **4. 90 years of radio theatre in Italy. One History, more genres**

Broadcasting fiction on radio has always been exclusive to the Rai<sup>2</sup> in Italy and, being simultaneously popular and prestigious, has represented a distinctive feature for our public broadcasting stations. Since its origins radio fiction has undergone

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<sup>2</sup> RAI is the acronym for Italian Radio Television Public Service Broadcasting.



continuous changes, from initial adaptations of theatre scripts to the successful texts written specifically for the radio and adaptations of literary texts and finally, the success of the *serial*, a new narrative format for radio narration. More recently, thanks to the connection between radio and the Internet, radio fiction is also offered both through Radio2 and Radio3 podcasts. It is no coincidence that Radio2's fiction has received prestigious international awards such as three Prix Italia (for *Pop Corn*, by Tiziano Scarpa, in 1997; *Fuori programma n.7*, by Federico Fellini, in 1999; *The Castle* of Eymerich, by Valeric Evangelisti, in 2000) and, also at the Prix Italia, two special mentions (in 1996, with *La lontananza accanto a noi*, a drama by Dario Voltolini, and in 2001 with *Diabolik*). These are all productions that, thanks to the originality of content, as well as their expressive quality and realization, have contributed much to the enhancement of the radio medium. However, the positive experience of Italian radio drama international recognition seems to end at the beginning of the third millennium, together with productive investment in this radio genre.

The long history of radio fiction can be summarized in the transition from the first reproductions of pre-existing theatrical texts, to the subsequent reaffirmation of written text specifically for the radio and literary adaptations to episodes, and finally to the “serials” and even “radio cinema” as a privileged form of radio narratives.

The audio version serial is developed over time in a substantial number of episodes. While radio theatre has always kept its own specific cultural identity, the most popular forms of fiction have gradually been identified with “the script” (Monteleone, 1991 and 2001; Natale, 2004). This term, initially referred to the literary short adaptations of literary text, was then extended to indicate also scripts written specifically for the radio, mysteries and serials. Today, in everyday professional routines, the term *serial* coincides, with the different types of the Radio2 and Radio3 series.

### **a) First original radio drama**

When did radio drama originate in Italy? It must be said that compared to the rest of Europe, Italy was a latecomer. The first experiments date back to 1926 with a competition for action, comic, or tragic radio drama. However, it was not a great success because the authors and directors were still skeptical of this genre. But the official entry of theatre in radio occurred on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1927, one year later, with *Friday 13*, a very colorful story by Mario Vugliano and written for the radio by Gigi

Michelotti (Ortoleva and Scaramucci, 2003). This initiative was extremely successful, as reported by the Union Radiofonica Italiana (URI) official magazine, *Radiorario* (18<sup>th</sup> January, 1925 when URI official media was founded in Rome). *Radio Timetable/Radio Orario* was a 24-page publication whose price was 1.50 Italian Liras (annual subscription 45 Liras). The cover layout was simple, and the goal was to publish only major Italian and foreign radio stations programming. A year later the editorial staff moved from Rome to Milan and changed the title to *Radiorario*. Yet, not everyone warmly welcomed radio drama enthusiastically. Some criticism also emerged, which quite ironically referred to precisely those characteristics that became later a source of strength in this type of programming.

*“Radiodrama is that thing  
In which everything is well mixed  
Even the whistling wind is there  
Since the public cannot.”*

ANNO III 29 Gennaio 1927 N. 8

# RADIORARIO

Organo ufficiale dell'Unione Radiofonica Italiana  
 Direzione, Amministrazione, Pubblicità: MILANO - Corso Italia, 13 - Telefono 86-239  
 Abbonamento Italia e Colonia L. 30. - (Esere di stampa) - Agli abbonati dell'U. R. I. L. 30.  
 Un numero speciale L. 1,50

## IL PRIMO ESPERIMENTO DI TEATRO RADIOFONICO

Come preludio e prova alla trasmissione dei radiodrammi per i quali la U. R. I. ha bandito - con quelle delle canzoni - appunto *Carosone*, i *M I* e rappresentata « la sera del 18 gennaio, « VENERDI' 13 » di Mario Vigianno.

Il lavoro venne, a richiesta, replicato la sera del 22. Questo, con le immensi telefele e le centinaia di lettere ricevute dagli ascoltatori della Stazione di Milano, si dice che la prova può ritenersi felicemente operata.

Uniamo, il momento alla introduzione della stessa scena scenica, per cui al pubblico bastava e disponeva di « vedere »; lodi valsero all'autore del radiodramma ed a' suoi efficaci interpreti plauso entusiasta alla U. R. I. « che sempre si rinnova e migliora », con invito a persistere nella attraente e riuscita iniziativa del Teatro radiofonico.

Critiche, nessuna? Pochissime: più osservazioni giustissime sul argute che critiche.

E la U. R. I. e l'autore di « VENERDI' 13 » lo accettano con lo stesso animo grato delle lodi.

A concludere da quella su cima:

*« Radiodramma è quella cosa in cui tutto ben si meschia: pare il vento c'è che giuoca perché il pubblico non può »*

d'un poeta che ha avuto il torto di mantenere l'anonimo, quando la sua fine sperava una tale piacevole e per nulla offensiva.

Altri, anzi altri (lo ripeto, si sa, sono più assillati dicono: tutto bene, bellissimo; ma non si poteva scegliere un radiodramma meno terrificante? Abbiamo abbreviato di punto, durante l'andamento, e, dopo, si è accostato a prender sonno. Lode all'autore, che ha raggiunto pienamente il suo scopo, ma anche preghiera a lui ed alla U. R. I. di tenerci un po' più allegri per l'avvenire.

Ma certamente, il radiodramma non è monotono. La parola « dioniso » va qui intesa nell'antico suo significato greco di « rappresentazione » e non già in quello moderno e corrente di azione violenta e lastrimosa.

Dunque si prepaiono le « snalliti ascoltatori » a sentire anche un radiodramma... allegro. Anzi allegri- mosi: chi il teatro radiofonico va, dicono così, da Riccardo al Grand Guignol - sono questi i suoi limiti, per

BEATRICE DANIELLI - fidele in « Venerdi' 13 » ora, almeno. Le « commedie di pensiero », ascoltate con la cuffia, anticipano il « buona notte a tutti » della spudore.

Dunque, per necessità, ancora radiodrammi e radiodrammi. Va bene? Proseguiamo, ora, l'evane delle lettere.

Parecchie le osservazioni sulla « tecnica » del teatro; non tutti gli abbonati, data la varietà dei loro radioradi, li hanno intesi, allo stesso modo. Da queste osservazioni, che dimostrano l'interesse al nuovo esperimento e la cordiale volontà collaboratrice del nostro pubblico, terranno il debito come l'ing. Gerardo Tullino e il

Source: <http://www.teche.rai.it/il-teatro-alla-radio>

It was necessary to wait until 1929, the year in which Luigi Chiarelli's police-detective *Theodosius ring*, recognized as the first radio drama, was broadcast (Sacchetti, 2011: 18).

**b) The epoch of literary adaptations**

Due to writers' reluctance to engage in writing designed specifically for radio, radio drama in Italy, unlike other European countries, struggled for a long time before becoming a well-established narrative tradition. However, literary adaptations did increase progressively. In the post-war period prose offers on the radio enjoyed a new popularity and during the fifties programming could boast about the simultaneous presence of various forms of radio fiction (with the sole exception of the serial). Programming provided a rich theatrical repertoire of Italian and foreign authors, with a series of fixed appointments scattered among the various networks. Great space was also set aside for short scripts, ranging from half-hour to forty-five minutes, based on nineteenth-century literary and detective stories). There were also many radio plays, mostly by famous foreign authors. The production of this radio genre, now considered as the most proper form of radio-related narration, is still alive and well today, receiving impetus from the incentives offered by national competitions to young authors and the commissioning of those few established authors who do not disdain the medium (Malatini, 1981; Grandi, 1995).

**c) The script as a form of loyalty**

A turning point in prose programming leading to more popular informative forms came about in 1967 under Leone Piccioni, the new Director of the Radio. In the context of a more general project to relaunch radio, script production with the first *feuilleton*: *Rocambole*, by Ponson du Terrail offered a significantly larger number of episodes (35 daily episodes of about 15 minutes each). The script was adapted for radio by a group of cinema and theatre screenwriters. This was the first in a long series of short-episode scripts intended to speed up and lighten fiction production. In time, this initiative was to be transformed into an important work of cultural enlightenment, which from the early *feuilleton* as *Rocambole* and *The Three Musketeers*, gradually extended to recovering and adapting successful films (*Ben Hur*), biographies of great characters and masterpieces of world literature (*War and Peace*). These productions, which occupied the morning slot of the Second Network (Malatini, 1981), were carefully chosen and very accurate. Among the public these

kinds of productions were the most followed, appreciated and destined to further consolidation (Motta, 2000; Monteleone, 1992 and 2001; Natale 2004).

The short adaptation from literary works, replaced by original episodes (detective stories, stories inspired by real life events, facts from the news or current affairs in general), decreased between the late seventies and the beginning of the eighties. Multiple voices “Complete Readings” of great novels, beginning with Manzoni’s *Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed) were successfully introduced during the afternoon slot and continued without interruption until 1994.

#### **d) The ’80s soap opera: between private television and public service radio**

During this period, based on the Anglo-Saxon mass media model, which had begun on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1937 with *Guiding Light* broadcasted on television in 1952 by CBS, new forms of narrating soap operas began to be considered for wider consumption in Italy.

In line with what was already happening in the Italian television market, at the beginning of the eighties, after the birth of Fininvest—which had introduced the soap opera in private TV programming on 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1985—the first Italian soap opera, *Matilde*, was aired. Running for 183 episodes, it was written by Carlotta Wittig and directed by Gianni Bongioanni and told the story of a woman caught between family duties and an old love from youth. This was followed in 1986 by *Andrea*, a story of a thirty-year old yuppie, which ran for 195 episodes and the family saga *Villa dei Pomegranni* that was running for 260 episodes between 1987 and 1988.

Subsequently, radio series stabilized around 40 to 50 episodes each and then around 20 to 30. Moreover, to avoid an excessive identification with sentimental plots, stories with science fiction or detective elements were also introduced. Restructured like this, radio serials offered an alternative to the lengthy afternoon television transmissions. However, before getting to the present day, one last step was still missing: short to medium length format series (10 to 30 episodes) was also extended to narratives other than those of the classic soap opera: from the contemporary stories, to the family drama, police investigations, and new literary texts written specifically for radio.

**e) The invention of morning radio and the success of short episodes**

Up to 1998-1999 there had still been a fixed appointment with the afternoon detective story. After that, airing remained twice a week on Saturdays and Sundays at 9.00 a.m. and a daily one at 8.47 a.m. In effect, for a long time radio fiction was concentrated in Radio2 Rai morning slot. Much of its success was due to the effectiveness of the formula and programming:

- Short 12-minute episodes.
- Contents suitable for listening while driving or doing domestic chores.
- Airing immediately after the 8.30 a.m. GR radio news, aired between two programs with a cult series following such as *Fabio and Fiamma*, *La Trave nell'Occhio (The beam in the eye)* and *Il Ruggito del Coniglio (The Rabbit's Roar)*.
- About 12-13 different genres and content annually, with were no more than three to four repeats and all offered in serial format (from 10 to 30 episodes) (Natale, 2004).

Finally, for Radio 3 Rai programming, some interesting productions need to be mentioned: the second edition of *Atto Presente Presente (Single Present Act)* cycle, experiments in writing on social reality in six radio plays (short texts, 40 minutes, written, directed and interpreted by professionals from the theatre and cinema world); and *La Storia in Giallo (Yellow Stories)* which reconstructed scripts about great crimes from the past followed by ten episodes debating in the studio, each lasting 30 minutes). The short to medium length serial formula proved to be particularly suitable for stories told on the radio, from the point of view of both production and the listeners. In relation to the quality of the product, long stories in short episodes are economically advantageous: they allow the registration of multiple episodes within the same production shift; they allow to establish voices characterization, music and sound effects from the very beginning; the narrative structure is designed to accompany the viewer over the days and weeks, allowing the story and characters to develop over time while maintaining attention through the intertwining of main and secondary plots, and wisely putting off the final conclusion to the last episode. All guaranteeing a certain degree of repetition needed to involve listeners who have missed previous episodes.

The specificity of radio serial lies precisely in the fact that its duration, contained within 30 episodes, is positively reflected in a variety of genres and contents, ranging from current events to historical ones, from detective stories to literary adaptations.

In addition to these genres, the so called “news stories” are worthy of mention. These find inspiration in today's social reality, ranging from news events, to public life and private relations problems. The news stories, so understood, have a traditional presence in Radio2 fiction. Orientation towards realism of everyday life expressed the idea of a fiction intimately linked to social reality, to an area of the imaginary likely to represent a sort of guide and reference point for its numerous and faithful listeners:

- *The Ladder for Winter* is a mystery series set in our day but with frequent flashbacks to the Middle Ages.
- The Fury of Eymereich* is a story of disturbing prodigies at the time of the Hundred Years War between French and English people.
- A Strange Coincidence* about the lives of two women, one alive today and the other living during the Second World War.
- The Third Twin* is a sci-fi thriller about genetic manipulation.
- Futbol* (by Guido Piccoli, Claudio Grimaldi and Giuseppe Tortora) and *Sparring Partner* (by Angelo Longoni), are inspired by problems in sports: one deals with the problem of doping in football, the other is a film noir set in the boxing world.
- The issue of immigration is at the center of the mystery programme by Piero Soria, *The Secrets of San Salvario*.
- Dealing with the difficulties of private life are original dramas for radio and television: *The Morning has Gold in its Mouth*, a psychological story developed around a dialogue between a patient and her therapist and *Il ritorno di Fiamma (Back Fire)* (by Enrico Caria and Fulvio Ottaviano), which links the issues of relationship between two very different sisters and competition within a couple (Natale 2004).

A constant presence in the fiction programming are the so called “action genres”, dealing with crime and adventure. Recreating the effect of suspense through sounds, an essential component for this type of narration, has turned out to be particularly suggestive and effective form of radio-phonetic expression. A few successful titles worth mentioning are: the exotic adventure *par excellence* of Emilio Salgari, one of

the world's most famous adventure novel authors and creator of the character of Sandokan (*The Tigers of Mompracem*). An equally mythical character in the police-based genre is, without doubt, the commissioner Maigret, created by George Simenon (*The Investigations of Commissioner Maigret*). These are all stories derived from literature, which keep alive a practice consolidated in the fifties with the transposition of great nineteenth-century novels extended to contemporary authors. In the wake of this tradition, we find *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a short literary adaptation of Romana Petri from the novel by D. H. Lawrence in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Monteleone, 1992; Natale, 2004).

**f) New trends: biographies, adaptations from comics and news stories**

The biographies of great contemporary characters, such as John XXIII in *An Unexpected Teacher*, a reconstruction of the life of the “Good Pope” based on the historical work of Enzo Gatti, was enhanced with the inclusion of Rai archive documents and excerpts from the actual Pope's diary. Another biographical title is *Jackie: Story of a First Lady* (originally by Chiara and Andrea Varzini, on the life of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis).

Adaptations from comics deserve a separate discussion, ranging from the noir text *Diabolik* (first broadcasted in November 2000) to the western *The Adventures of Tex Willer* and the horror one *Dylan Dog*. These represent an ideal completion of radio's call to weave relationships with other narratives: from literature as a repertoire of cinema texts to television as a contribution of professionalism, up to the comic strip. When transferring these from paper to sound waves, comics are required an extraordinary use of radio's repertoire sounds and noises: for example, they are supposed to be able to render the double dimension of dream and reality in which “the investigator” of the nightmare *Dylan Dog* moves. But, over the last years, this Radio Rai tradition has been transferred, together with copyrights for radio adaptation to Radio24, a Talk Show Radio belonging to the Italian publishing group Il Sole 24 ore. Starting from Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2016 the new *Dylan Dog* radio series ran for a total of ten episodes.

Another relevant example on radio drama versatility were *Titanic: The 100 last voices*, an original production by Vittorio Schiraldi (1993, 20 episodes), and *102 minutes at Ground Zero. Last voices from the Twin Towers* by Massimo Guglielmi. The latter was a radio fiction in ten episodes “instant movie” narrating the last dramatic minutes between the first plane impact into the North Tower and the final

collapse of both World Trade Center Towers, which took place within an hour and 42 minutes. It contained stories depicting the last minutes experienced by a multitude of people before the final tragedy: the frantic chasing of words, thoughts, memories, and then moments of pause interspersed with cries and despair and fleeting moments of calm, evoking the sense of inevitability of the event. Told through radio in its most raw and profound human aspects, the drama is purified from all elements of rhetoric and morbidity. *Titanic and 102 minutes at Ground Zero* has the characteristics of real “radio events”, due to the exceptionality of this type of narration in networks programming (one title per year), and the compelling emotions in production.

### **g) Cult: Diego Cugia and the rage of Italian people**

One kind of fiction which we can distinguish in Radio 2 Rai programming for its linguistic uniqueness and screenplays, was written and directed by Diego Cugia, author, director, writer, also considered the inventor of radio film, a new radio fiction format with a cinematographic angle.

Among his programs are:

- *Il Mercante di Fiori*, radio film in 60 episodes (1996, *The Flower Seller*).
- *Rumors-Voci Incontrollate* (1996, *Uncontrolled Voices*).
- *Mio Carissimo Signor Padre* (1996, *My Dear Mister Father*).
- *Domino Radio*, film in 50 episodes (1997).
- *Alcatraz-Un DJ nel Braccio della Morte* (1998-1999, *Alcatraz-a DJ on Death Row*).
- *Alcatraz-Il programma di chi non ha più niente da perdere* (1999-2000, *Alcatraz-a Programme on Those Who No Longer Have Anything to Lose*).
- *Jack Folla C'è* (2001-2002, *Jack Folla Exists*).

In 1999 Italy listened for the first time to the words of Giacomo Folla, a DJ condemned to death for murder as he shared his thoughts from a US prison. Diego Cugia borrowed his words to produce the programme. Perhaps because the airing took place during Berlusconi's rise to power (who was often criticized indirectly by Folla), or perhaps because Folla's voice was dubbed by Roberto Pedicini, indisputably one of the most beautiful Italian dubbing voices, the format succeeded, and audience numbers were very high. A palpable cult show following on the



character of Jack Folla, whose voice expressed the rage of Italian people. The language was poetic, but also aggressive, direct and arrogant. Seen from his “2 meters per 3” American cell and given that he had nothing left to lose, Jack Folla commented on Italian society critically and controversially and continued on Radio 2 until 2002 (Cugia, 2004).

#### **h) Cult: Montalbano Commissioner beyond television towards radio fiction**

After the television success, starting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2002, Radio 2 and Rai Fiction also transmitted a radio version of *Commissioner Montalbano*, based on the novels of Andrea Camilleri and published by Sellerio. From Monday to Friday, at 8.45 a.m., radio listeners could relive the famous Commissioner's exploits in the two investigations concerning *Il Ladro di Merendine (Snack Thief)* (script by Andrea Camilleri and Francesco Bruni) and *La Voce del Violino (The Violin's Voice)* (screenplay by Angelo Pasquini and Andrea Camilleri) in a radio adaptation of ten episodes each with Luca Zingaretti (Montalbano) and Michele Gammino (narrator). The music which was composed, orchestrated and directed by Franco Piersanti, was not, as often happens, a complement to the work, but was, itself, a protagonist and moreover an ‘accomplice’ of the protagonist, Montalbano. In fact, a CD containing the original music of *Il Commissario Montalbano* (Rti Music and Rai Trade Spa on the “Image Music” label) has also been released. The idea of integrating television and radio fiction was by Annarosa Mavaracchio, who personally supervised the adaptation, while the technical work was conducted by Roberto Rossi and Violetta Parodi.

#### **i) The Radio 3 experience in “The Theatre on Trial”**

In recent decades, a significant role in maintaining Italian radio drama tradition has been carried out by RadioTre Rai. In 1997-1998 the great cycle *Theatres on the radio* was aired on Radio 3, under the guidance of Luca Ronconi. This was followed by *Theatres on the Radio-Europe Today* (2000) by Franco Quadri, with a cycle on the new contemporary European dramaturgy. For instance, *Il Terzo Orecchio (The Third Ear, 2002)* by Mario Martone, with a new review of radio pieces produced specifically for the media (including the ones by Pippo Delbono and others by the Societas Raffaello Sanzio), and *Il Consiglio Teatrale (The Theatrical Council, 2005)* edited by Franco Cordelli. By rediscovering archive texts in 2011 the program *Tutto Esaurito! (Sold Out!)* (directed by Marino Sinibaldi, edited by Antonio Audino and

Laura Palmieri) was created and, after this, the airing of shows intensified, above all narrative theatre and monologues. These were live and uncut versions of contemporary dramaturgy, produced in front of an audience in RAI room A. Radio news reports have been proposed under the heading *Il teatro in prova e collegamenti con gli artisti prima del debutto* (*Theatre rehearsal and interactions with artists before the debut*, Radio 3 suite).

While it may be reasonable to underline the consolidated interference of theatre on the first radio dramas, it is, with regard to contemporary radio, more appropriate to talk about a “collaboration” between the two areas. This indicates a situation of equality in which each is fully aware of the other’s uniqueness. It was precisely in these terms that Brecht, with surprising foresight, hypothesized the future cooperation between radio drama and theatre:

[...] the radio could play a completely new form of publicity in favor of the theatre in so far as it supplies real information, information that is indispensable. A comment of this kind, closely connected with the theatre and which would constitute a completion of the drama, equal to it in value and quality, could give rise to entirely new forms, etc. A form of direct collaboration between theatrical and radio shows could also be organized [...] (Brecht, 1933: 48).

Radio Rai’s original *Third Program*, Radio3 has always been focused on cultural popularization and, by tradition, on committed involvement in all “word arts”, ranging from poetry to prose, through dramaturgy and singing (Isola, 1995). Analyzing Radio3 evolution from the end of the nineties to present, it is interesting to note how Rai’s cultural channel has renewed its commitment to theatre genres, placing alongside the recorded productions (both live and through the remakes in the radio studios), in-depth programmes that move from stage to backstage, revealing the dynamism of the composition, and its development and transformation into a theatrical work. The *Teatri in Prova* show of 2011 is an example in this direction.

On Mondays there is a column entitled *Il Teatro in Prova (Rehearsal Theatre)* where we do some real radio reporting on a company is rehearsing a show. Let’s go and get the sounds, the voices, the comments and the stories of those who are putting on a show about to go on air. This is to offer listeners another invisible piece of theatre which is the rethinking, the construction, and the development phase of artistic operation [...] (Nebbia, 2011).

This original formula is due to a “revolutionary” approach towards theatre, which began with the innovative policy of Marino Sinibaldi who has been director of Radio3 since 2009.

With Marino Sinibaldi we have set ourselves an additional problem; i.e. to understand whether on the radio today it is still possible to transmit a complete dramaturgical text. In other words, whether the spectators can experience the long duration of theatrical action on the radio (Nebbia, 2011).

This collaboration between radio and theatre led to new forms of entertainment, which although closer to information genres than to creative ones, gave rise to innovative cooperation between the two communication systems. Radio is no longer a simple means of transmission; it has become a means of transformation and detailed consideration. The latter is a mutual insight on the public through the combination of two expressive forms apparently so distant and yet, so close, as the long history of their expressive partnership shows us.

## **5. Results. Radio Theatre as Transmedia Content**

After experiencing some decline in recent years in the wake of the numerous digital media alternatives, radio drama has been living a second youth thanks to the widespread popularity of audiobooks and podcasts.

With some exceptional Radio 3 programmes, especially available in digital form on Public Service Broadcasting archives (Rai Teche and Radio Rai archives), radio drama has been almost completely abandoned by Radio Rai. However, a rebirth was experienced with *Favole al Telefono (Stories on the phone)* and the radio fairy tales, told through the Radio Kids Rai network<sup>3</sup>, or some websites dedicated to radio drama, such as *Radiodrammi.it*, which offers short radio theatre clips lasting three and a half minutes each and satisfies listeners’ curiosity and eagerness ([www.radiodrammi.it](http://www.radiodrammi.it)).

Radio drama offer at Radio Rai has been in part replaced or improved by other radio broadcasts, such as Radio24 talk show radio edited by the Sole 24 Ore Italian

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<sup>3</sup> Rai Radio Kids is an Italian thematic public broadcaster published by Rai and born on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2017. It broadcasts a schedule for the age group between two and 20 years that includes cartoon soundtracks, fairy tales, listening education and reading.

Journalistic group. This radio, with the voice of the singer Enrico Ruggieri, deals with real life stories inspired by well-known celebrities and heroes, through the programme *Il Falco e Il Gabbiano (The Hawk and the Seagull)* on air from Monday to Friday at 03.05 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. and Saturday at 10.00 p.m. These lives have something extraordinary to tell. There are often unknown stories and events of normal people who have been able to achieve greatness and do things that have left their mark. These are paradigmatic stories of those who have succeeded, of those who have tried, and of those who have had misfortunes and success as well as people who have defended their values through errors and fragility.

Though not typical radio drama stories, they use features of this genre to tell contemporary stories. They provide entertainment to audiences through the use of voices, music or noises, all of them typical ingredients of radio drama.

The digital renaissance of this kind of multi-genre radio tradition also involves a new and interesting phenomenon, the advent of audio books, which is found in the Amazon experiment, Audible. Starting from data obtained in the survey 'The Infinite Dial 2019', made by the Audio Publishers Association, we can analyze the audio book market in the US to have an idea of the current trend, which will also be experienced in the European markets (APA, 2019).

The Infinite Dial 2019 data shows that 50% of Americans aged 12 and older have listened to an audiobook. This is the first time that audiobook consumer penetration has reached the 50% mark, up from 44% in 2018, according to Edison Research and Triton Digital. The multiple ways that audiobook listeners can digitally access their content are helping them to find more time for listening. The Audio Publishers Association (APA)'s annual consumer survey shows that slightly more than half (56%) of audiobook listeners say they are setting aside "new" time to listen to audiobooks, resulting in an increase in audio book consumption. According to the APA survey, 74% of audiobook consumers listen to them in their cars, up from the 69% in 2018. Home is the second most popular place, with 68%, down from 71% in 2018. Technology is playing a major role: 62% of respondents who have in-dash systems have listened to an audiobook (Edison Research for Audio Publishers Association, 2019).

The relevance of this growing phenomenon in Italy is also documented by the desire to invest in professionals' training in the sector, entrusting this training to radio drama authors and directors. In autumn 2018 Audible, from Amazon, the leading company in the world for sound entertainment production, opened Audible

Academy in Italy, a course in plays writing and dramaturgy for audio promoted with the aim of training new authors and drama format adapters of works designed and made specifically for digital listening. The project is directed by Sergio Ferrentino, author, radio and theatre director, and founder and director of Fonderia Mercury. This project, aimed at nurturing Italian creative community, further demonstrates the very positive growth trends both in Italy and in the rest of the world and, therefore, this genre versatility apparently due to media archaeology and, indeed, rich in potential.

#### **6. Conclusions. Looking to the future, towards a digital renaissance of radio theatre**

To conclude, beyond commercial issues, we cannot overlook the profound social value of this radio genre. Particularly, radiotheatre in digital era is consistent with Internet reality and thanks to short formats and adaptability to mobile devices radio plays have a relevant function for visual impaired people and also it allows social contacts among lonely people. However, the true relevance of this transmedia genre (Hayes, 2011) consists on its ability to provide a convincing alternative to the need of getting rid of the Net compulsiveness by listening, conceiving and narrating stories, like those in the narrative universe of talk show radio, which often provide surveys, life stories, social, cultural and political messages, through the typical techniques of radio drama tradition (Chaparro, 2014). Radio dramas also have an important function in children's linguistic education. Furthermore, they can also be an important tool for teaching and learning languages and integrating migrants. Finally, by exploiting the widespread phenomenon of university radios, creating and interpreting radio dramas could favour interdisciplinary work teams. For example, in universities they can be use as a tool for literature students (to exercise writing or adaptation), theatre arts (for interpretation and direction), engineering (for sound technicians), computer science (for special effects), anthropology, communication and media, education sciences etc.

We are facing a large amount of expressive opportunities based, above all, on the people's need to listen and create stories, in addition to cultural tradition and transmedia capacity of radio drama (Salmon, 2007).

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