

## Sound Evidence, 1969: Recording a Milanese Riot

MILAN, 19 NOVEMBER 1969, NOON. In the heart of the city center, on the streets surrounding the Duomo, two crowds converge. The first, a large group of union workers, is gathered in the Teatro Lirico—there is a general strike all over Italy, the grievance being a rise in the cost of housing. A second group, an assortment of extra-parliamentary left-wing organizations whose Italian crop was in full flourish by 1968, is marching down Via Larga. Since the Teatro Lirico is also on Via Larga, the workers leaving their assembly mingle with the other demonstrators. The crowd swells and heaves. The police intervene. After a few moments, the scene has degenerated: the police, in vans, move toward the demonstrators; the demonstrators find steel tubes in a nearby building site and use them as weapons. A police officer driving one of the vans—Antonio Annarumma—dies in the struggle, in circumstances that remain unclear to this day.

Competing accounts of the event appear almost instantly. Italy's president, Giuseppe Saragat, releases a public statement laced with imagery of a body politic assailed by lethal pathogens:

This odious crime must serve as a warning to all: to isolate the criminals and put them in a condition of no longer being noxious; their purpose is the destruction of life.<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT On 19 November 1969, two members of Milan's neofolk music collective the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano (NCI) armed themselves with portable sound recorders and wandered amongst a crowd of demonstrators near Milan's Duomo. The resulting LP, *I fatti di Milano* (The events of Milan), is a puzzling hybrid of artistic and political intent. As the sleeve note explains, the demonstration degenerated into a riot and resulted in the violent—and to this day legally unresolved—death of a police officer. The NCI members presented the recording as sonic evidence of the day's events, hoping to help the case of the demonstrators accused of murdering the policeman. The record thus constitutes not only a swerve from "music" to "sound" in the collective's output but also a move from aesthetic artifact to sound document, indeed, to putative forensic evidence. And yet, the evidence grows inexorably murkier with every listening. This essay homes in on the contradiction between *I fatti di Milano's* declared purpose and the sound recording it mobilizes toward that end. Drawing on both sound studies and Italian political philosophy, the essay argues that the record embodies and actively stages idiosyncratic but highly contemporary relationships between music and soundscape, between sound event and its technological reproduction, and ultimately between political event and the act of writing history. REPRESENTATIONS 147. Summer 2019 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 26–58. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2019.147.1.26>.

Many demonstrators were illegally incarcerated for several months while they awaited trial. The leading left-wing newspaper, *L'Unità*, published eyewitness accounts from both striking workers and a judge (Domenico Politano) at the Milan tribunal, who maintained that “[the police carried out] an aggressive act on a peaceful demonstration.”<sup>2</sup> Other commentators, including left-wing writer Nanni Balestrini, maintained that the police attacked first, that Annarumma collided with another police van, and that his death was subsequently framed as murder in order to antagonize the extra-parliamentary left.<sup>3</sup> The Italian Confederation of Workers’ Unions (CISL) suggested that the extremist left-wing groups were of “suspect provenience,” meaning that they might have been infiltrated, perhaps by neofascists seeking to pin a political murder on the left.<sup>4</sup> Slogans calling to avenge Annarumma’s death appeared on walls across the city.<sup>5</sup> In the police barracks at the Milanese northeastern district of Bicocca, where Annarumma was usually stationed, the climate became increasingly exasperated. Far-right press such as the weekly *Il Borghese* called for the occupation of the city by the police.<sup>6</sup> When, a few days later, Mario Capanna, leader of the Movimento Studentesco (the university’s leading left-wing group and part of the group accused of Annarumma’s murder), attended the funeral of Annarumma to offer his condolences, he narrowly escaped lynching by a mob of enraged policemen.

The ensuing trial did little to calm this tense atmosphere. While responsibility for Annarumma’s death was officially attributed to the demonstrators, an individual culprit was never found: what the law produced was not the cathartic exhibition of a criminal body, but an immaterial moral shadow cast over a mercurial, disorderly crowd—a collective that could take on different political shades depending on the onlooker. Viewed from the hindsight of the decade that followed, the whole episode—and the atmosphere it generated—was grimly familiar and not unique to Italy. The state of constant urban confrontation, in other words, was one that characterized many nations during the height of the Cold War. This “low-intensity warfare”—the US Army term used to describe the situation in Italy, as well as in Greece, West Germany, and Chile in the 1970s—saw official and unofficial police forces mobilized to curb left-wing political extremism. In Italy, as elsewhere, the decade beginning in 1969 was dubbed the *anni di piombo*, the years of lead—a period characterized by political violence by way of artillery: bombs detonated on trains and in railway stations and banks and the kidnapping and murder of politicians, activists, and members of the police force.

As I have mentioned, neither the epithet nor the political situation was exclusive to Italy during the years of the Cold War—indeed, the phrase *anni di piombo* was coined in 1981 by German director Margarethe von Trotta,

who made it the title of a film about the tensions between East and West Germany. In Italy, the term referred to a series of urban guerrilla actions resulting from several layers of political conflict: the skyrocketing of private industry profits during the years of the economic miracle (1958–1963) had been accompanied by neglect of the public sector—housing infrastructure, health services, and education—that became the subject of frequent and vociferous protests among workers, university students, and left-wing intellectuals. By the end of the sixties, these sectors had articulated into a myriad of competing extra-parliamentary left-wing groups. Some of these (such as the Movimento Studentesco, the Marxisti Leninisti, and Adriano Sofri’s Lotta Continua) had considerable traction and contacts with Soviet Russia, argued for the necessity of political violence, and had ties with the Communist Red Brigades. Although in conflict with one another over the minutiae of their political programs, all groups protested the parliamentary left, which in 1969 consisted of a first-time coalition of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democrats (DC). This same government—and anything to the left of it—was also under attack by numerous neofascist groups such as Ordine Nuovo, and Avanguardia Nazionale. Although the plan came to nothing, Julio Valerio Borghese, a naval commander during the fascist regime who continued lobbying for extreme right politics after the war, allegedly gathered armed forces to attempt a coup d’état—now known as the Golpe Borghese—between 7 and 8 December 1970.<sup>7</sup> The US government—which had kept very close ties with the center-left Christian Democrat government since the 1950s—naturally did not want the extreme left to gain traction in Italy; but by the seventies, as some Wikileaks cables have since shown, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was actively invested in discouraging inquiries into the links between neofascist sympathizers and the police, a disquieting position considering that Italy was in the aftermath of an attempted—if badly executed—military coup, and that Kissinger would in 1973 openly support the Chilean *golpe* against Salvador Allende.<sup>8</sup>

The product of these tensions was an atmosphere in which violent extremes mingled and were even played against one another by a government intent on preserving its precarious stability at all costs. Extreme left-wing groups were often infiltrated by spies from the extreme right, and vice versa. The strategy of “false flagging”—that is, of committing a crime in such a way as to pin responsibility on a particular political group—was a key mode of operation in the late sixties, one whose effect was not so much a successful laying of blame as a deeper destabilization of any identity behind political action. If a crime could be committed so as to look like the work of a leftist group, then the very ideal of activism—that of making direct, immediate dents in a political order—was shattered into a forest

of signs, which were then subjected to the vagaries of representation and interpretation.

A period such as the *anni di piombo* presents a peculiar kind of problem to any historian (let alone a sound historian, as we will see). Unresolved crimes, violence without a culprit, were more rule than exception in this period—it was a time of “terror as usual,” to use Michael Taussig’s sinister oxymoron.<sup>9</sup> Such crimes are always already embedded in a highly sensationalist public record dating back to the violent event itself and woven in a literary and visual corpus that spans, by now, decades. A violent event existed in a particular “climate of representation”—to use Lisa Gitelman’s phrase—through which the event was codified into reports that rooted themselves in the memory of the city’s inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> The climate, in the case of 1970s Italy, was characterized by sensationalist public statements, such as Saragat’s intimation of biopolitical terror, which pointedly fails to identify any political purpose behind the violence other than the “destruction of life.” The sensationalism, though, was not a general matter of rhetoric, of overstatement, or even of metaphorical language. The historian can’t pretend to scrape it off as mere ideology, exposing the live historical flesh underneath. And this is why: in the history of Italian politics that begins with the explosion in Piazza Fontana and extends to the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, it was hardly ever the loss of life, the most concrete consequence of political violence, that was sensationalized; rather, it was precisely the unintelligibility, the impossibility of conclusive evidence regarding its perpetrators that was staged, proclaimed, bemoaned, and ultimately sold.<sup>11</sup>

This climate of representation, in which unintelligibility is presented as a kind of standalone reality effect (that is, such a picture, or such a witness, is telling the truth because its contents or testimony are unclear), puts the historian in a peculiar double bind. We don’t know, for example, if Annarumma was intentionally murdered or died by accident, perhaps as a result of attempted self-defense. Nonetheless, reporting this particular or any event as a problem, as an unresolved issue, is to appropriate the mode of presentation of the event itself at the time of occurrence, making the historian complicit with the sensationalist press coverage. And yet it is also essentially impossible for the historian to resolve the mystery (and this is, of course, the mode of Italian microhistorians like Carlo Ginzburg, who directly engaged with the historiographical and political problem of the *anni di piombo*) and demystify the sensationalism: for all the putative resolutions of the Annarumma, Piazza Fontana, and Aldo Moro cases, none of them have yet amounted to an official legal resolution. Indeed, not only is the overblown mode of representation difficult to deflate into a legal resolution, but one could also argue that sensationalism in 1970s Italy aided, rather than defied, the exercise of the law: in response to the Moro murder,

Prime Minister Francesco Cossiga passed a law (formulated on 15 December 1979 and passed on 8 February 1980) sanctioning mass incarcerations, unwarranted searches, and more severe punishment for terrorist activities, effectively turning the problem of unintelligibility into permission to persecute, rather than legally try, members of activist groups deemed suspicious.

This is not to say that the question of the aesthetic value, the performativity and complex sensationalism of the coverage of political violence at this point in Italian history hasn't been examined by historians.<sup>12</sup> It is, however, striking that, by and large, these analyses have focused on visual evidence, on either printed media or photography. Verbal media—newspaper articles, interviews, and so on—could also embody terror insofar as they were shown merely to report on what seemed unsettling documentary evidence. Of course visual evidence and its presentation were even more crucial to the building of such an atmosphere—from the typesetting of headlines, to the pictures included with the report, to the street-level “eyewitnesses” on which journalistic reports of this kind so heavily rely. Historians have since produced accounts of precisely the representational work performed by 1970s media, accounts that are largely based on an analysis of images and news clippings. In the case of Italy, a collective study was published in 2011 of an iconic image of Milan's *anni di piombo* (a balaclava-wearing demonstrator pointing a gun at armed police), showing the work of representation evident in the technical features as well as press coverage of the photo. There is, on the other hand, a pronounced dearth of critical studies about sound media in these same circumstances. This is an odd lacuna. After all, this is a historical period in which recording technology allows for extensive sonic documentation—not to mention surveillance—of events that could then be broadcast or even circulated as recordings. Is this lack of a critical history of political sound recordings simply a sign that recorded sound has lost the race against visual media as a source of proof, and thus as the subject of historical critique? Or is it that the act of recording sound is considered by default less mediated (more presence than representation) than visual reproduction, and thus, again, less worthy of critical attention? And if so, how might we begin to think of a representational climate for sound in these decades?

### **The Central Problem: Impossible Aurality**

Among the demonstrating crowd on 19 November 1969 were two members of the Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano (NCI), a neofolk collective founded in Milan in 1962: Gianni Bosio (one of the collective's intellectual leaders) and Silvio Ruggeri. Each was armed with a tape recorder, and each

let his apparatus record as he navigated the crowded streets. The tapes were edited into a single long-playing record (LP) and then released as part of a special collection under the label Dischi del Sole, the discographic label of Nuovo Canzoniere, in January 1970. The special collection was called “archivi sonori,” sonic archives, and the record’s title was *I fatti di Milano* (The events of Milan). To the best of my knowledge, this is the only recording of the demonstration on 19 November 1969.

*I fatti di Milano* is an anomaly in the Canzoniere’s output, and for several reasons. The first—seen by thumbing through the Canzoniere’s discographic catalog—is that it is one of only two records released by the Canzoniere in its sixteen years of activity (1962–1978) that not only was cut in Milan but was also *about* Milan, the city that hosted the collective and represented its central field of action. The other example, released in May 1972, also for the “archivi sonori” collection, consists of an exercise in oral history: a collection of protest songs and interviews with workers striking at Milan’s Crouzet factory. Yet *I fatti di Milano*—whose title declares a belligerent adherence to evidence (“fatti” can, in other contexts, also mean “facts”)—is a far stranger creature than its younger sibling. Were we to play the record before looking at its packaging—thus letting the vinyl speak first—we would hear a tumultuous urban “soundscape.” Unlike the other Milanese record, *I fatti di Milano* provides no transcription of the recorded events: it is not, that is, an “oral history.” It couldn’t be if it tried: little in the recorded material amounts to intelligible speech. Crowds babbling, police sirens, agitators’ voices, and political hymns blaring out from loudspeakers can be heard; occasionally, a fleeting agitated voice moves into aural focus and then fades away. We seem to be hearing phenomena that exist somewhere between our current concept of a “soundscape” and an aural rendition of late nineteenth-century crowd theories: a simmering primordial soup of political eventfulness, preceding and resisting semantic intelligibility.<sup>13</sup>

The recording is, however, punctuated with unnerving intermittency (on average every three minutes in the fifty-three-minute duration) by post-produced captions announcing the exact place and time of recording. This painstaking attention to journalistic detail would seem unnecessary until we turn to the LP sleeve, in which Bosio informs us that

the LP contains a selection from a larger amount of material recorded between 19 November and 4 December 1969 on behalf of the Ernesto De Martino Institute. The entire documentation has been entrusted to the team for the defense of those arrested for the so-called “events of the Teatro Lirico.” The LP is presented here with the subtitle “counter-information,” and it is meant to challenge the version produced by the authorities in charge of public order and the official press. This general and explicit purpose has not prevented us from choosing the material with

the care necessary to the reasoned presentation of truthful evidence. And this truth emerges with great precision and incontrovertible clarity from the tapes, from the synchronous sonic document, and from contemporary testimony.<sup>14</sup>

It's important to note that Bosio declared the LP to be perfectly intelligible—its “great precision and incontrovertible clarity” was able to compete with accounts such as those of the country's leading newspapers. The LP was so intelligible, in fact, that it performed a function rarely expected of a soundscape: that of judicial proof. Of course, it is easy to discern some of the contradictions in Bosio's statement: he admits to editing the tapes (which initially amounted to some four hours of material), and the frequency of the post-produced captions might betray a faltering belief in the recording's ability to “speak for itself.” But it is significant that Bosio also seems to have acted in good faith: a note in the archive catalogs of Nuovo Canzoniere informs us that the original tapes were entrusted in 1969 to one of Milan's most famous leftist lawyers—Gianluca Maris—though they have not since enjoyed any kind of public life.<sup>15</sup>

This essay draws its structure and energy from the irreducible contradiction between *I fatti di Milano's* title and declared purpose, on the one hand, and the sound recording it mobilizes toward that purpose, on the other. This contradiction, rather than signaling mere failure or lack of understanding on the part of the record's creators, is to be taken seriously and offers us a way into a complex history of listening, and beyond that into an unusual—and, for us, highly contemporary—configuration of what we traditionally understand to be the boundary between aesthetics and politics. This seeming earnestness in asserting something so highly contradictory locks us into an aural and political impossibility. If this record seems to employ recorded street noises for what Roland Barthes would call a “reality effect” (the allure of the concrete provided by material and nonsignifying details), then where is the proof of a murder taking place? What kind of listening were the editors of the tapes hoping to engender in their audiences? And why on earth—among the multitude of activist groups in Milan—was this record produced by a folk music collective that had made no previous live recording of something as unwieldy as a rioting crowd?

### Unintelligible Artifact

The record comes in a crimson sleeve with a raised weave texture (fig. 1). The title *I fatti di Milano* appears in bold black uppercase letters at the top of the sleeve's front and recalls a sensationalist news headline. The words are underscored by an image occupying the entire lower half of the sleeve. The photograph of a bearded male face (artwork by Paolo Baratella,



FIGURE 1. *I fatti di Milano*, 1970. LP cover; art by Paolo Baratella.

although the record sleeve does not specify that the image is a self-portrait) is printed in black ink over a red background; it looks outward. The man's mouth is open, tensed in a scream, and his eyes are wide with horror. This image is pixelated: it recalls the black and white low-quality photographs of the newspapers; indeed, it is while looking at this male face that the thick weave pattern of the sleeve paper make sense under one's fingertips: the bumps of the paper weave pattern seem to interact with the pixels and halftones of the close-up face, as if to highlight an aesthetic of roughness and discontinuity.

The attention to sensuous detail seems at odds with the newspaper aesthetic; indeed, a closer look reveals a constellation of striking minutiae. The male face is presented as a series of three identical photographs splayed across the cover from left to right, at varying intervals and slightly overlapped. They could even be stills from a film, a pointed reference to cinema that would have struck contemporary handlers of the record: rumors of a lost video recording of the demonstration made by the Office de Radio-diffusion-Télévision Française (whose footage allegedly incriminated the police) were, and still are, common among the left's reports of Annarumma's death.<sup>16</sup> As juxtaposed prints of the same photograph, the image dramatizes the way news images can be tampered with: it seems to recall,



for instance, Andy Warhol's silkscreen print series of news photographs—also done on a primary color background—*Electric Chair* (1964), as well as *Race Riot* (1963) and *Car Crash* (1963). As with Warhol's prints, the chosen image hints at the imminence or even unfolding of violent action: the photographed face is stricken with horror; the electric chair, enthroned in an empty room, silently awaits the next execution; the impacted car's metal curls before our eyes. And as with Warhol's, too, the image is both exploited for effect and subjected to an irreverent artistic treatment. Sensationalist images (in Warhol's case, borrowed from news headlines) are serialized and filtered through primary colors: a reminder that a moment-defining public affair, much like Campbell's tomato soup, is permeated by the effects of garish marketing and mass manufacture.

It is difficult to know how to approach the evidence so earnestly promised once we listen to the record. Once the needle touches the record, we hear a slow, gentle fade-in from silence to the sound of a distant, large crowd chanting; words are impossible to make out, but the march rhythm and strain of loud, rhythmic vocal delivery comes across.<sup>17</sup> After eight seconds, a voice begins speaking. It's Bosio, his speech clear and well enunciated, its measured tone (in neat distinction with the protesters still heard marching behind him) tinged with a Lombard accent as he hesitatingly informs us:

The morning of the 19th . . . November 1969 . . . there sets off, er . . . on the day of the national strike . . . there sets off what may be the cortège of the minority groups [i.e., the extra-parliamentary left-wing organizations] . . . from the university.<sup>18</sup>

In the thirty seconds that follow, Bosio silently walks away from the chanting demonstrators (we hear the click of his shoes on the pavement) toward a group singing the "Bandiera rossa," a Communist protest song. There is then a fade-out to the end of the track at 1'33". What is odd about this opening is how distinct it is from the rest of the record: no other live commentary is provided by Bosio (though it is safe to assume that he kept the commentaries up during the rest of the field session, if only as a way of labeling material). No further raw sound bites are offered before we are given instructions as to what we are hearing—or indeed *should* be listening to. The start of the next track is heralded by a post-produced caption by Bosio that drily lists the location and emphasizes the presence of recording technology—that most "reliable" of ears: "davanti al Lirico, con l'apparecchio numero uno" (in front of the Teatro Lirico, with recording device number 1); Silvio Ruggeri, Bosio's colleague, was presumably recording simultaneously with a second device.

The opening of the recording is not especially striking per se: commentary after a brief initial sound bite was a trope of Italian radio documentaries

of the period, a way of drawing the listener in. Yet what is interesting here is the subsequent wholesale abandonment of live commentary in favor of post-produced captions, an obvious sacrifice of documentary credibility. We may now be less inclined to trust that the announced location and time match those of the recorded excerpts. Still, the decision is striking in that it betrays a privileging of vocal architecture over other, perhaps more straightforward, matters: Bosio's initially uncertain tone (the use of "probably"; his constant hesitations) might be considered inappropriate for a record that would be presented as evidence. Yet the murmurs of the crowd underpinning Bosio's voice, vague and indecipherable as they may be, endow the recording with an unmistakable "reality effect"—the material, nonsignifying excess of a live event.<sup>19</sup> To take the record as evidence, however, one would have to hear this nonsignifying excess as an unequivocal sign of a *particular* event. The excess must be scrubbed off the crowd's voice—a voice crowded with signification to the point of saturation—through the sheer authority of the captions. Moreover, the authority must be vocal, inoculating the excess of the crowded voice with *logos*: the male scholar's voice sanitized by the sound-proof studio.

Late nineteenth-century crowd theorists—Gustave Le Bon, Cesare Lombroso, Scipio Sighele—had long ago intuited that a crowd tended to fall short of intelligible utterance, and thus of clear political purpose and accountability. To them, such unintelligibility was the symptom of a lapse into "barbarian" behavior, a mode in which individuals no longer held themselves accountable.<sup>20</sup> Yet Bosio's position toward this crowd is more ambivalent: he more than likely celebrated, and perhaps wished to inflate, its demonstration of political power. Like any good Marxist, he would have seen in a mass protest an event of great significance, something whose sonic and vocal excess was, quite literally, music to his ears.

And yet he also wished to protect the demonstrators from attack by the police, to inoculate the crowd's sound with enough *logos* to prove their political intent. The contradictory structure of the recorded events of 1969 is instead better understood through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the relation of voice to state power than through turn-of-the-last-century social diagnoses. It is no coincidence that Agamben began his philosophical work on the voice at the close of the *anni di piombo*. Indeed, this 1969 crowd's aural and political life is very close to that of Agamben's notorious *homo sacer*: simultaneously immune from state power (it can neither be tried, nor formally punished, nor sacrificed) and vulnerable to it (anyone may harm it or kill it without suffering consequences). The voice of a crowd can easily be heard as that of a pack of unruly animals that needs to be disciplined or even killed; mass arrest at a demonstration, although technically unlawful, is easily carried out; but to bring a mob to court is

impossible. By the same token, a crowd cannot admit its own guilt or protest its own innocence; its voice falls outside the bounds of the law. The crowd's voice is always a signifying entity, but its meaning is—for better or for worse—*both* powerfully immune *and* helplessly vulnerable to state policing.<sup>21</sup>

It's worth pondering whether Bosio had intuited the political conundrum presented by a crowd's voice as he edited the record. As previously mentioned, there is a palpable nervous compulsion behind the insistent application of post-produced captions. The surest indication of ambivalence over the sonic content is, however, the record's cover, whose aestheticized layout and images seem deliberately to clash with Bosio's documentary conceit, and whose precise visual context seems geared toward the introduction of flaws, moments of rupture in the process of representation.

From a listener's point of view, the cover image's most striking detail is that its powerful sonic implication—it is, first and foremost, the image of a scream—corresponds to an evident, theatrical/visual *flaw*. The male's gaping mouth reveals an obstruction, an object blocking full view to his tongue, teeth, and throat. Yet the image's low quality makes it impossible to determine quite what the obstruction is. Is it a demonstrator's whistle? A mouth guard? Or is the vagueness a deliberate quality of the image, or indeed a printing defect owned as deliberate artifice? Once noticed, this detail becomes a perverse focal point, forcing the eye toward the very thing that the photographer, or the photograph, or this particular print of the photograph (the chink in the mediation chain is impossible to place with precision) both presents and masks.

We might even think of the obstructed mouth as the staged gateway (and barrier) for the LP's sonic content. What, one wonders, does such a mouth sound like? This is hardly a traditional version of the "silenced" *vox populi* imagery—a face with a gagged mouth, or a mouth covered by a hand; it is not a conventional metaphor of censorship or oppression. What we are witnessing is not mere "silencing" or a clear enforcement of power. It is much worse: a sound whose political semiotics are truly opaque. In front of the mouth is both an instrument and something of an obstruction—a version of the famous lock that Mozart and Schikaneder put on Papageno's mouth. It is both a technological reproduction of a visual reality—a photograph and a print of a photograph—and the result of a malfunction in that same technology. This image, underscoring the bold title of the record (The events of Milan), suggests a disquieting reading of the word "fatti": evidence that is not—as Bosio's captions seem to suggest—to be phatically coaxed against the grain of an unintelligible sonic trace, but is instead coextensive with rupture, with malfunction, with the unintelligible.

The staging of rupture and malfunction is not a rhetorical move limited to the LP cover, but something that seeps into the quick succession of captions and sound bites crafted by Bosio. This is especially obvious the moment we first hear police cars charging the demonstrators. Forensically, this is the key moment: it was probably during this onslaught that Annarumma lost his life. We are at 14' 40", two-thirds into side A and about a third into the record's overall length. We hear a few recorded voices—one of them Bosio's, the other a noncredited male—announce the imminent arrival of the police. Soon we hear police sirens approaching. "Attacca, eh, ecco . . ." (They're attacking, ah, here we go . . .), interjects Bosio, after which all we hear is an increasingly chaotic babble and the sirens growing louder and louder. We hear some noises—gunshots perhaps. A female voice beckons one Mario (possibly Mario Capanna, the leader of the student movement) to jump ("Mario, salta su!") to safety. The sirens get closer and louder, uncomfortably so. So loud, in fact, that the recording device ruptures into distortions and then cuts off abruptly, as if the microphone cable had been unplugged.

No explanation of this interruption is given. Only some ten minutes later, in the caption prefacing another sound bite, does Bosio inform us that recording device number one, which was recording in front of the Teatro Lirico, got stuck during the first police charges; it begins to record again in this lobby with a glass door facing the Teatro Lirico.

The wording of Bosio's explanation ("recording device number one got stuck") is ambiguous: human agency disappears, and the recording device is described as getting stuck—a word that connotes at once logistic impediment and technological malfunction—and then mysteriously unstuck, without any external intervention. As with the image on the cover, a flaw emerges in the mediation chain, which produces a lack; the obscuring of sound or sight is insistently brought to our attention.

Indeed, returning to the liner notes, we find that immediately after announcing "evidence," Bosio proceeds to describe it in odd terms:

And the truth, from the tapes, from the synchronous sound document, from contemporary testimony, takes the form of precise and incontestable details such as the absence of left-wing minority groups from the location of the police attacks . . . the absence of the customary police warning before attack; the crash between two police vans at the beginning of the attack on the unknowing and unprepared crowd; the first accounts of the demonstrators during the clashes.

With the exception of firsthand accounts—whose content is unsurprisingly contradictory and confused in the hubbub of the riot—Bosio's incontrovertible evidence consists of a litany of *absences*: whether it is the absence of

certain groups of people, sounds, or even—as is the case with the “unknowing and unprepared crowd,” a collective *mens rea*. Proof by sound recording is thus offered as something directly opposite to visual evidence—not a lesser or failed version of such evidence, but its idiosyncratic inversion: incontrovertible proof of what is *not* available to the jurisdiction of the senses.

Within this complex economy of representation, it now seems impossible to take Bosio’s initial offering of the recording as proof as definitive of its meaning. It is, however, an essential statement, the first element of a composite, foundational gesture. The gesture consists of an outstretched hand solemnly offering material evidence; yet on that same hand, something between a lack and an unintelligible object—an “absent presence,” as Jacques Derrida might term it—lies proudly displayed as forensic proof. We seem to be faced with a work of representation that offers unintelligibility and obscurity not as the opposite, but rather the *essence*, of historical and political evidence.

### **Sonic Anxieties: The Quest for Urban Folk**

The puzzling effect of *I fatti di Milano* stems not only from the overwhelming tension between its political and aesthetic registers, but also from the absence of univocal authorial intention—be this intention documentary, forensic-legalistic, or artistic—that emerges once we examine its multiple visual, literary, and sonic traces. Some of this confusion might be ascribed, pragmatically, to aspects of the record’s production. For instance, visual aspects of the NCI LPs’ packaging were often outsourced to volunteer activists—artists and typesetters who worked in relative independence of the creators of any given sound recording. The cover image of *I fatti di Milano* was not made ad hoc for the record’s release, but rather lent by Baratella, who, together with a dozen other local artists, worked with Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano and other local left-wing organizations as an illustrator and maker of murals and banners. Nino Crociani, who created an illustration included in the internal notes, had offered a drawing he made eight years prior, inspired by the Algerian War of 1961.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the record’s complex visual aspect is at least in part a result of a choral effort in the production of the artifact.

And yet it is impossible to dismiss this internal tension as a matter of genesis versus assemblage. If Bosio himself edited the whole LP, as his captions suggest, then the inclusion of that moment—so ungainly for documentary purposes—in which the microphone comes unplugged *in medias res* is not an accident or a matter of multiple authorship. It is possible that Bosio’s thoughts on the LP evolved as he edited it—hastily, over what was

sure to have been a hectic December for the collective and for left-wing activism in Milan in general—into its final form. Indeed, we can trace this genuine ambivalence down to the moment of origin of the artifact: the live recording of the demonstration. The only account we have of the genesis of *I fatti* comes from Sandro Portelli, one of Bosio's collaborators on later "sound archive" records. Portelli, who was to become the Italian deacon of oral history, had not worked on *I fatti di Milano* directly but must have discussed it with Bosio at length. On one occasion, he recalls the circumstances of the record's making in some detail:

The invisibility of urban folk meant that we were looking for it everywhere, recording and archiving anything we could lay our hands on. I remember a tape, which still exists today in the archives of the Istituto de Martino, in which someone had gone down to a street corner and switched on the microphone, as if to say, we don't yet know what to look for in the city, so let's just begin by listening, let's collect the sounds, and we will later try to understand what they are and if they make sense. At that time it was impossible, and perhaps even wrong to distinguish between noises, sounds, words, language, and form. We used the microphone as one does a "candid camera": in Milan, Gianni Bosio recorded the clashes in which agent Annarumma had died (the tapes proved that it had not been the demonstrators' fault, but the law courts refused to listen to them) and made of it a recording of noises, sirens, fragments of conversation, and the screeching of brakes; naturally, no-one bought it.<sup>23</sup>

Three things are especially striking about this quote: first, the expression "urban folklore," a strikingly oxymoronic phenomenon whose primary attribute is unavailability to sight—a property that lends sound a rare primacy over sight as a tool of anthropological evidence. Yet this focus on sound is hardly straightforward; the particles of "urban folk" that are audible remain mostly unintelligible. Portelli comes closest to articulating the complexity of *I fatti* when he recalls the suspended aural epistemology typical of the NCI's work of that period, the inability to distinguish "noises, sounds, words, language, and form." Even more striking, Portelli characterizes this state of indiscernibility not only as a lack and a failure but also as something of an *active* moral stance ("it was impossible, and perhaps even wrong") on the part of those handling the microphone.

Portelli's dictum here—that it was perhaps *wrong* to parse sounds—is especially telling if we consider that *I fatti di Milano* is the only record in the NCI's output in which this suspension, this overwhelming unintelligibility, really holds true. That is, Portelli is describing not a "school of thought" within the NCI but a crucial, fleeting moment in its political and intellectual existence during the late 1960s, a moment of which *I fatti* is a unique embodiment. The NCI had opened its doors in 1962 as an institution essentially devoted to the documentation and diffusion of traditional musical

cultures over the peninsula; its activity included a small record label (the previously mentioned “I dischi del sole”), a weekly magazine (also under the name of Nuovo Canzoniere) and some intense theatrical activity that resulted in high-profile controversial performances such as the theater show *Bella Ciao*, commissioned by Giancarlo Menotti for the Spoleto Festival in 1964. As the 1960s progressed, and with the increasing pressure of political unrest leading up to the autumn of 1969, the collective fell prey to a series of dramatic internal rifts and consequent fragmentation of activities.

Arguably the most high profile of these rifts was between Bosio (among others) and Roberto Leydi, one of the most famous Italian ethnomusicologists. The subject of the controversy was the relationship of the neofolk collective to the contemporary city that hosted it. I have already mentioned that *I fatti di Milano* was one of only two recordings made by the collective about the NCI’s home city. Indeed, this striking dearth of self-reflexivity speaks eloquently of internal tensions in the collective’s political and aesthetic agenda. For the first five years of its activity, the collective’s output revolved around two main types of musical findings: traditional songs from rural parts of the peninsula “harvested” by ethnomusicologists and workers’ songs from the industrial north (Milan and Turin especially) whose literary trail, dating back to the end of the nineteenth century, was significant. Bosio, with a background in *operaismo*, the championing of urban working-class culture, would grow to be particularly critical of the collective’s focus on the rural, a trait he referred to as “marxismo di campagna” (countryside Marxism).<sup>24</sup> Still, it is significant that until 1969 he, too, could only take the city into consideration from the vantage point of the previous century’s musical literature.

The musical activities of contemporary Milan—and particularly the commercial music transmitted by the ever-expanding networks of radio and TV—were considered by all NCI members to be ideologically compromised. Leydi, Bosio, and all those involved with the NCI believed that the working class—the heirs of the rural subaltern classes—had been duped through TV and radio into accepting the social norms and forms of middle-class behavior, a phenomenon that broadly paralleled the emergence of alienated labor within the factory. Losing control of the means of production in the workplace was, to them, tantamount to losing control over the means of cultural production in their sensorial everyday life. Commercial music of any kind was the aural equivalent to this double process of aesthetic and political trickery, a musical trickery that NCI classified under the derogatory Gramscian category of “cosmopolitanism.” Because mass media and labor alienation was seemingly all-encompassing, most music in the city was also irretrievably contaminated. Thus, for instance, Giovanna Marini, a musician and active member of the NCI, would remember that she had willingly

ignored the Beatles for years in the 1960s on the grounds of their political irrelevance.<sup>25</sup>

The question that concerned both Bosio and Leydi was, then, whether and how to proselytize among the working classes they so wished to emancipate. In the early years of the NCI, theater performances were perhaps the most powerful interface between the collective and the city, and it is thus significant that the decisive incarnation of the rift between Leydi and the rest of NCI emerged as a controversy over the link between musical style and matters of political representation. Once field recordings had been gathered, how should songs be adapted for the stage? Should they be transcribed, arranged for modern instruments (the guitar), stripped of dialectal references and adapted for vocal delivery by urban members of the collective? Or should the original performers be invited to deliver the songs themselves? If so, how should the dialect be made intelligible to the audience? If adapted, should the songs' words be modified so as to work as contemporary protest songs? Should new songs instead be composed imitating the style of the NCI's field recordings?

Behind this anxiety was a fundamental disagreement about the nature of a politically authentic musical object. Leydi, who held a personal archive of recordings whose extent has only recently been systematically explored, understood language—including the dialects potentially unintelligible to Milanese audiences—to be inseparable from the vocal aspects of any song truly examined in its conditions of political, economic, ethnic, and social possibility. He had already made this point in 1961, when he wrote:

It is very dangerous to speak—as it is often done with regard to spontaneous music—of “singing,” as a matter-of-fact general category. To speak of “singing” in general would mean erroneously to assume a formal unity among all voluntary musical expressions produced by humans by means of their vocal organs. Every people displays its own mode of singing, and vocal style is not defined according to an abstract general concept, valid for every epoch, every occasion and every latitude, but in direct relationship to the ethnic, historic, religious, and social vicissitudes of the community to which it belongs, and to the phonetic system of the spoken language.<sup>26</sup>

This commitment to preserving the historically born heterogeneity of vocal phenomena in the subaltern strata of the population combined, according to Cesare Bermiani's recollection and history of the NCI, with a centralizing archival tendency and also with a willingness to enlist the support of high-art institutions like Milan's Piccola Scala (a now defunct smaller stage devoted to experimental and modern theater) in bringing traditional music into the mainstream cultural life of the city.<sup>27</sup>

Bosio, instead, held that the relationship between subaltern musical practices and institutions such as La Scala should be an oppositional



one—and that praxis should be the primary objective of the NCI’s musical research. This praxis started with the gathering of field recordings, but it aimed at repurposing them as tools for protest. Only songs sung in street protests had a genuine political life, and adaptation was a necessary step toward the renewed adoption of a repertoire capable of emancipating urban audiences out of their state of alienation from their own class and struggle. It’s worth noting that Bosio wasn’t a musician by training, so his methodology concerning music was perhaps less a medium-specific program and more of an extension of his understanding of a politically righteous cultural practice. One of the clearest iterations of his methodology would come in 1971 in relation to NCI theater performances—performances that made extensive use of repurposed traditional songs. After making a distinction between a “Teatro popolare” (a theater entirely conceived by the peasant and working classes) and a “Teatro politico” (a theater conceived by intellectuals to “educate” the working classes), he outlined his third way, which he dubbed “Teatro mimetico”:

At the intersection of these two different experiences [i.e., Teatro popolare and Teatro politico] . . . lies the attempt made by a few organic intellectuals to recuperate the skin of Teatro popolare and fill it with homogeneous, political contemporary content, give it back cleansed, clarified, made sharper as a tool for provocation on behalf of both the people and the working class, and launch it as an exemplary, devastating battering ram against bourgeois culture.

Striking here, in the admixture of surgical and then military metaphors, is Bosio’s obvious desire to tame the same heterogeneity that Leydi discussed in relation to traditional singing practices and shape it into a kind of functional, streamlined body politic ready to strike against a compact hegemonic block. In short, Bosio was, and had always been, an *operaista*: he believed that working-class culture should conceive of itself as deliberately, pragmatically oppositional to what he saw as a separate and clearly defined bourgeois high culture.<sup>28</sup> And here was the crux of his disagreement with Leydi, who instead advocated a respect for the complexity of heterogeneous cultural practices whose historical *raisons d’être* made them more than just underdeveloped tools for class struggle. Indeed, Leydi’s position came at the cost of a fundamental disinterest in—if not active distaste for—the use value of traditional music as a means for political activism.

### Gramscian Sounds

Still, Leydi’s discontent with Bosio was not merely, as his opponents suggested, a scholar’s philological conceit. Both Bosio and Leydi were Gramscian thinkers whose interpretation of the same intellectual and

political legacy led them down diverging paths. This is unsurprising, given that Gramsci's own thinking on folklore, and more generally on the value of linguistic, cultural, and philosophical practices produced by the subaltern strata of the population, was far from univocal. Bosio believed in Gramsci's notion of the "organic intellectual" whose work is inseparable from the political struggles of the urban working class, down to the minutest details of praxis. Indeed, Bosio understood himself, carried himself, and related himself to musical practices as one such intellectual. This meant that he took seriously Gramsci's observation that subaltern culture shouldn't simply be romanticized as an "other" to modernity, but needed to be rationalized and organized into a potentially hegemonic force by organic intellectuals.<sup>29</sup> But the fundamental issue—the precise ways in which subaltern culture can function not only as resistance to but also as the overcoming and replacement of bourgeois hegemony—remains thorny even in the *Notebooks*.<sup>30</sup> What should happen to dialectal speaking communities once they became educated into the Italian language, into literacy? What would become of subaltern cultures whose role as resistance to hegemony came from their form and circulation as primarily oral artifacts?

In the aftermath of the Bosio-Leydi schism, Bosio's new collaborator, anthropologist Alberto Cirese, would devote a long, difficult essay to disentangling the exact question of the definition and political value of folklore in Gramsci.<sup>31</sup> The essay, published in 1969—the same year as *I fatti*—is the first rigorous account of the ambiguity in Gramsci's understanding of folklore, conceived of as subaltern language, culture, and thinking. In one of the most illuminating passages in the essay, Cirese diagnoses the tension between a "positive" understanding of folklore as a subaltern practice potentially separate and resistant to bourgeois hegemony and a more pervasive "negative" understanding of folklore as something fragmented, implicit, weak, and splintered, which is by definition subaltern to the more unified ideology of bourgeois hegemony. Such a tension, for Cirese, has had polarizing consequences for contemporary scholars and activists:

And it is precisely in these tensions and ambiguities that the contrasting interpretations I mentioned at the beginning originate; these interpretations tend, at their most polarized opposition, to either take Gramsci's positive assessment [of folklore] of his object of study and pour it into possible political utilization, or to draw on his negative assessment of the modes and contents of folklore and turn it into scholarship.<sup>32</sup>

The tension between positive and negative understandings of folklore elucidated by Cirese is indeed the tension between Bosio and Leydi. By this I don't mean simply that Bosio stood for a positive stance and Leydi for a negative one, but rather that, faced with the complexity, splintering, and

hybridity of a supposed “folklore,” Bosio aimed at refashioning that complexity into a positive folklore worthy of political praxis, and Leydi called for the preservation and respect of a disunity and heterogeneity that rooted such practices in subaltern groups. Leydi’s push for a nuanced approach to the linguistic and historical complexity of traditional music was as Gramscian a concern as Bosio’s push for political utilization.

Let’s now bring matters firmly back to sound and language. Put in the simplest possible way, the question of a positive or negative understanding of folklore rises to the surface whenever the scholar-as-activist faces sounds that appear to be unintelligible. By unintelligible, I mean linguistically, culturally, and politically—and for Gramsci these three are one and the same—remote from a unified, workable interpretation, from *logos writ large*. Gramsci had trained as a linguist, and his last notebook was steeped in the question of the politics of grammar and intelligibility. He was critical of philosophers like Benedetto Croce, who tended to adopt literary and aesthetic criteria that risked tuning out as “nonsense”—as literally nonsignifying—any utterance issuing from, or related to nonhegemonic culture.<sup>33</sup> In a typically elliptical, fractured sentence, Gramsci articulates his difference from Croce’s writings on grammar when he muses:

The problem [of grammatical errors] has to be cast differently, framed by a “discipline of the historicity of language,” particularly in the case of “ungrammaticalities” (which are absences of “mental discipline,” neo-lalisms, local particularities [jargon or dialect], etcetera.) . . . In fact, all that which is not “grammatically accurate” can be justified from an aesthetic, logical, etc. point of view, if one sees it not from the specific logic of mechanical expression, but as an element of a broader more comprehensive representation.<sup>34</sup>

Part of the reason for the convolutions and ellipses of Gramsci’s writing here—aside, of course, from the objective conditions in which they were written—may be a genuine difficulty in articulating a “positive” version of subalternity: not merely as error, but as an alternative conception of the world (the tension between positive and negative folklore mentioned earlier). But this particular critique of Croce, for all its ambivalence, would have a considerable impact on postwar anthropology. Indeed, Leydi’s debt to Gramsci was filtered through the work of Ernesto De Martino, whose seminal writings on southern tarantism and mourning rituals were informed by Gramsci’s critique of Croce and offered a model for the commitment to seemingly unintelligible phenomena, aural and otherwise, as a moment of encounter with something resistant to hegemonic forms of signification.<sup>35</sup>

Leydi’s Gramscian strain has a kinship with these concerns, elaborated for the more specific purposes of ethnomusicology. In 1961, he wrote:

There is nothing left to note except how the line separating the supposed “rationality” of music from the supposed “irrationality” of language becomes extremely blurred as soon as we descend, from the extremities of the two terms of comparison, to those elementary manifestations of vocality (calls, cries, invocations, or formulas) that belong at once to spoken language and to music. Logic and experience show us clearly that the passage from these simple and somehow hybrid elements to the grand, self-conscious features of musical production takes place by infinitesimal degrees. Therefore, there can be no possible reasonable distinction between these two stages beyond mere convention and arbitrariness.<sup>36</sup>

The silent point of contention behind this quote is the act of musical transcription and adaptation (a key element of Bosio’s practice). In Leydi’s opinion, transcription risks becoming an unreflective normative practice that severs sound practices from their linguistic roots, rendering into a transcribable melody something that resists the very distinction of music and language. Music, here, is not the nineteenth-century romantic escape from *logos*, but rather *logos* itself (Leydi warns against “the supposed rationality of music”)—a force capable of abstracting a sound practice from ground-level vociferation, from the disorder of speech. The scholar has, therefore, a duty not to enforce a set of musical conventions at the expense of the complex area of indistinction between voice and speech, sound and semantics, music and language. Unintelligibility had, in Leydi’s ontology, a political value as the sonic incarnation of folklore in its negative Gramscian understanding. Bosio, on the other hand, was concerned primarily with the potential of field recordings to be memorable, repeatable, and chantable political hymns: to constitute a positive, phatic folklore. Unintelligibility had, for him, no real political purpose. Leydi’s ideal intellectual and political practice was the archive, as much as protest song was Bosio’s.

### **The Split and the Archive**

The final break between Bosio and Leydi came in 1966, when Leydi, who had been working as consultant for a theater performance guest-directed by Dario Fo (the show *Ci ragiono e canto*, whose title translates as “I think about it and sing”), became so disillusioned with Fo’s privileging of theatrical efficacy over accurate sonic and linguistic representation that he abandoned the collaboration and resigned from the NCI altogether.<sup>37</sup> This internal rift, however, pervaded the NCI’s internal structure far beyond the Bosio-Leydi affair. It may be witnessed in 1967, when the NCI opened its archive, the Istituto Ernesto De Martino (the only part of the NCI that has remained active to this day). In 1973, Franco Coggiola would write of the archive in a way that spoke subtly about the moment of self-reflection that its opening signified for the NCI:

Since the beginning, the aim of the Institute was to collaborate in raising awareness of the role that the renewed interest in the folkloric [popolare] world could take on within the framework of our society . . . to rationalize the collected material and to put it back into circulation so that it might provide a stimulus towards new forms of contemporary culture.<sup>38</sup>

The convoluted phrasing of Coggiola's mission statement—a collaboration toward . . . an awareness of the role of . . . an interest—says much about the move away from activism. Field recordings could now be released by the archive as documentation. Indeed, a great number of the records released by the Istituto De Martino, including *I fatti*, were labeled “strumenti di lavoro” (tools for work). Through the institution of an internal archive releasing its own documentary discography, matters of linguistic and musical representation could be, if not resolved, then at least circumscribed and indefinitely postponed: archived indeed. The opening of an archive in the very year of Leydi's departure also signals something subtler, more disruptive: the inoculation of the NCI's project with and against their chief detractor's (and erstwhile leading member's) critique. The institution of the archive here serves both as a means of acknowledging—through the very institution of the archive and the acknowledgment of the materials to be collected therein—a traumatic event in the history of the institution (Leydi's departure from the collective) and as a way of storing it as a form of external memory that allowed the members of the collective to overcome and forget the ideological rift that had torn through the NCI.<sup>39</sup> This is the ambiguity at the heart of Derrida's understanding of the archive as a place where the past is both transparently stored and also forgotten, repressed.<sup>40</sup>

This process of internal absorption of the intellectual and political rupture can be understood not only as the embracing of the archive as part of the NCI's core activities of linguistically unparsed field recordings but also as a willful pairing, particularly on Bosio's part, of that archival impulse with contemporary research on the city as a new form of documentary praxis. In 1966 Bosio wrote of “the interest, preeminent within the NCI, for urban research and for the reconfiguration of our movement into a more suitable organization: we hope this organization will be the Istituto Ernesto De Martino.”<sup>41</sup> To pair the practice of field research with the contemporary city—in Italy of the late 1960s—meant overcoming hardened dichotomies that described folk music as the exclusive property of a disappearing countryside. It is worth noting here also that Leydi, upon leaving the NCI, not only continued with his work as a researcher but also put together, in 1967, a high-profile Milanese theater show at the Teatro Lirico entitled *Sentite buona gente* (Listen up, good people). The show, elaborated in collaboration

with fellow ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella, featured performances of various strains of Italian traditional music by the original musicians themselves, without, that is, the mediation of transcriptions, arrangements, and rescorings that were the default *modus operandi* of NCI performances. Carpitella would recall *Sentite buona gente* as an aesthetic political project aimed at accessing the rural working classes and their music in unmediated fashion, albeit one plagued by major contradictions:

We had the intention of theorizing about the intellectual “non mediation” and immediacy of the protagonists. In hindsight we can say that even this project had a few limits, as well as some acceptable outcomes. Among the latter we should remember the “direct” communication of the performers (timbre, rhythm, performance style, their face, their movements, their clothes, etcetera), which is a significant element, but they were still (and these were their limitations) placed in a “bourgeois space.”<sup>42</sup>

Needless to say, any belief in unmediated access to a community is, of course, a remnant from a relatively unselfconscious mode of anthropology—one not yet put through the wringer of postcolonial critiques or theories of positionality, nor through Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological critique of precisely this kind of intellectual effort. But the attempt to stage an unmediated rural musical tradition in the city is fascinating. Milan—with its theaters and industrial working classes who would be unlikely to attend them—becomes the place that makes the attempt both necessary and, if not impossible (according to Carpitella), at least riddled with severe contradictions.

The complexities of a performance like *Sentite buona gente* deserve (and have recently received, from Domenico Ferraro), a more in-depth discussion than I offer here.<sup>43</sup> But it’s important to note that Leydi’s contradictory transplant of traditional musicians onto a high-profile Milanese stage is, in some ways, a version of that chase after an unmediated sound event caught, stored, and perhaps even bred *in the city* that Portelli describes when he wields the oxymoronic category of “urban folk.” It is striking that, many years later, once he had become the household name for oral history in both Italy and the United States, Portelli would refer to the Istituto de Martino as a kernel of unfulfilled potentiality for what oral history *could* have been:

Oral sources are *oral* sources. Scholars are willing to admit that the actual document is the recorded tape; but almost all go on to work on the transcripts, and it is only transcripts that are published. (One Italian exception is the Istituto Ernesto De Martino, a Milan-based militant research organisation, which has been publishing “sound archives” on records for at least 12 years, without anyone in the cultural establishment noticing.)<sup>44</sup>

At stake in Portelli’s remarks is a notion—which has since come under justified attack—of orality as the undocumented other to writing and so,

also, as the other to written history as a hegemonic practice; but also a bitersweet sense of an original unwritten utterance that, once institutionalized, is homogenized and disciplined into transcripts. This is precisely the discourse of orality as immunized vocality powerfully analyzed by Ana María Ochoa Gautier in relation to nineteenth-century Colombian language ideologies. Here I want to be careful not to discuss ideologies of orality over too broad a historical and political spectrum: in Italy and elsewhere, orality is very much a mid-twentieth-century ideology, grounded deeply in extraordinary beliefs about the transparency and fidelity of recording technology, whose consequences I will unfold presently. But perhaps the most important point for my purposes is that the Leydi-Bosio *querelle*—about language, music, praxis—reappears in all its glory, but under a new guise. The Istituto De Martino, insofar as it took on the task of preserving a trace (a necessarily archived trace) of an orality without semantics, unruly by *logos*, becomes at once the posthumous, archival resolution of the 1965 rupture of the NCI and the premature, even stillborn version of the discipline of oral history in the late 1970s.

The strangeness of a term like “urban folk” is indeed a version of this same problem—persistent, haunting, resolved either too late or too soon. Portelli’s nomenclature makes clear that the turn toward the city in 1969 was an unfinished project, a suspended contradiction. The city’s folklore was a necessary category for the NCI’s intellectual survival, and yet it was also a phenomenon primarily defined by what it was not and could not be—first, of course, the abhorred commercial music diffused through mass media, but second, traditional “songs” harvested in the countryside. “Urban folk,” in other words, could only be shown to exist by virtue of what it was *not*, what it would not sound like. Indeed, beyond its negative determination, urban folk as a category is something of a provocation to deconstruction, a glitch by which a long-held, postenlightenment dichotomy of city and countryside (“urban” and “folk”) is spun into a single oxymoronic term tearing at the seams.<sup>45</sup> The concern with an originary music (so originary as to require an indiscriminating ear for all sound), authentic and unspoiled *and yet* at the same time fully representative of a historically determinate industrial proletariat, has the effect of turning “urban folk” into something that cannot exist as a presence: a sound, a recognizable aural experience of authenticity. Instead, its authenticity consists precisely in its withdrawing from presence, in its aural manifestation as a rupture of sense, as disturbance that eschews categorization.

The only means of providing a material trace of this elusive phenomenon was the undiscerning mechanical ear of a recording device. And in 1966, Bosio would publish “Elogio del magnetofono” (In praise of the magnetophone), arguably his most famous essay to date. The essay opens

with unsurprising remarks on the magnetophone's ability to capture an unmediated "reality," but it grows more convoluted as it gets closer to the definition of this reality.<sup>46</sup> By the middle of the essay, Bosio seems to reject the notion that urban folk might have anything to do with songs, or perhaps even music, moving toward a murkier definition of its sonic properties:

Research on contemporary urban reality is, however, unlike traditional research. To search for the sounds of the city or, worse still, for forms of expression akin to those of the peasant world (petty criminals, tavern songs, and little else) is as productive as working by commission in order to get rich. The countryside—by virtue of its disappearance—may help one understand the city; but the city puts the countryside to death. One must work towards finding—inside, or between the folds, above or at the very boundary—the world of a man who is derived by financial profit. From there we can retrace the conditions that define this world.<sup>47</sup>

With the aid of a recording device pointed haphazardly, Bosio strives to find something akin to the physical, immediate sonic emanation of what he deemed the elusive political reality of the city. But as he inches toward the definition of this anthropological reality, the field of his search—the city—becomes bent, folded, full of mysterious threshold areas hiding the object of the ethnologist's desire. The crumbling dichotomies against which Bosio is working here—what we might term the suspended sonic epistemology behind the turn toward the city—actively shape the object of his listening, point at its location and hide it at once.<sup>48</sup> Now his "man derived by financial profit" almost sounds like the aural (and rather dystopian) version of the "honest man" that forever escaped the halo of Diogenes's lamp. Both Diogenes's philosophical stunt and Bosio's search seem to point toward a performed absence: something powerfully conjured to the senses by a breathless, failed search. It was under the star of this contradictory bind—the sonic recording of a conjured absence—that the NCI intersected with the Milanese urban violence of the late sixties.

### **The Absent "Fatti": Between Aesthetics and Politics**

To put all this another way, *I fatti di Milano* brings together—in its genesis, structure, and placement within the history of the NCI—a political and aesthetic quest. The search for audible proof of the demonstrators' innocence is also, at the same time, the search for a recorded sonic event—or perhaps an imaginary, inaudible music—suitable to the NCI's shifting ideology. To say that the political quest for proof and aesthetic quest for "urban folk" are folded together is to place insufficient emphasis on their profound mutual entwinement. It would be better to say that both of



these desperate searches—the one carried out by Bosio, and the scavenge for proof that the record stages and encourages in its listeners—are, in fact, the same thing, symptoms of a fundamental desire to access an original event. The microphone is the key tool for both of these searches, a tool accepted with blind faith as a relay of truth. So blindly, in fact, that it cannot fail, even when it malfunctions: the original events recorded are not separate from the lo-fi crowd babble, they are not separate from the distortions produced in the attempt to record them—they are them.

Oddly enough, the dichotomy of copy and original—such a key aspect of ideologies of sound and sound technology—collapses, years before the concept of “schizophonia” was even formed, because of an excessive belief in the transparency of recording technology. It is almost as if Bosio and the other ethnologists had arrived at a negative theology of the sonic event—as something that can only be known not through positive attributes, but through things that are not, ruptures and absences in the act of listening. But it is even more striking that the collapse of the original-versus-copy dichotomy accompanies a collapse of aesthetic and political meaning: the aesthetics of urban folk overlap fully with the politics of proof. Both concepts become urgent—it is necessary that there be a politically righteous music; it is necessary that there be proof to bring perpetrators of political violence to accountability—and yet at the same time obscured from our senses and understanding. The distrust of the NCI’s musical adaptations of field recordings initially expressed by Leydi, but ultimately appropriated by Bosio in his turn toward urban sonic ethnography, points precisely to the distrust of the work of representation implied in musical transcription and even composition. This turn away from musical composition, and its unreliable mode of representation of an imaginary sonic reality, is a product of the possibilities provided by sound-recording technology. It was precisely the possibility of swapping musical representation for a supposedly less mediated “reproduction” of sounds that inspired the turn toward “urban folk.”

And it is telling that a shadow of this same conceit still haunts our own current turn toward “sound studies,” so much so that one of the leading thinkers of this turn—Jonathan Sterne—devoted a key section of his seminal book *The Audible Past* to dispelling the idea that the ontology of recorded sound should be predicated on the idea of copy (disembodied recording) versus original (embodied sonic reality), an idea whose most famous and poetic nomenclature is Murray Schafer’s term “schizophonia.” Sterne writes:

“Original” sounds are as much a product of the medium as are copies—reproduced sounds are not simply mediated versions of unmediated original sounds. Sound reproduction is a social process. The possibility of reproduction precedes the fact.<sup>49</sup>

The most convincing analysis of *I fatti* takes its cue from Sterne's point: the notion of an elusive, *original* sonic reality to be captured by the itinerant ethnologist armed with magnetophone is a product of the emphasis on originals and copies that accompanied the rise of sound reproduction. Reproduction, that is, is the most social of processes, a politically and historically determinate representation.

But what can be added to this analysis is perhaps a broader range of what listening practices that are informed, indeed, by the belief in an original event graspable by recording technology can do to radically turn that belief inside out well before anybody poses the question as a theoretical concern. From the vantage point of contemporary sound scholarship, Bosio's way of approaching the city—with a microphone held aloft, minimal interactions with people, and portable, lo-fi technology even by late 1960s' standards—is woefully outdated. *I fatti* was underpinned by a faith in the objectivity of the recorded sound that is antithetical to the discipline of sound studies as it is configured today.<sup>50</sup> And yet, the record is highly unusual in that this very outdated faith in authenticity leads, paradoxically, toward a radical undoing of the notion of “original sound event”—and so should give sound students pause for thought. It was precisely because Bosio believed recorded sound—including the sound of a microphone coming unplugged—to be true to an original event that he took scarcely intelligible fragments, absences, gaps, and ruptures to be the very substance of the sonic event. The lo-fi, muffled, unintelligible or distorted sounds captured by those portable recorders were not taken to be faded copies of a vivid original. Instead, it was as if they had perfectly captured the original by the very virtue of their glitches and failures. The distortions and eventual unplugging of the microphone at the key moment of the first police charge are placed—flaunted—at the heart of the record, as the culmination of its purpose. The original sound event is something that resists the microphone, that leaves a trace of something unintelligible, incomprehensible, impossible to parse and transcribe. Far from being a mere by-product of the proneness to failure of Bosio's portable recorder, this origin as failure is built into the core of recording technology.

To say that *I fatti* embraces or even hails the unintelligible debris that lies at the heart of sound recording as the Lacanian “real” (as Friedrich Kittler famously suggested in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*), is still not saying enough. The epistemology of politics and sound underlying the record is not one that embraces noise as an alternative form of sonified knowledge, political or otherwise. Rather, the record—taken here as not only the sounds but also the sleeve, the image, the representational work of the artifact at large—is meant to model an impossible listening, and so actively to produce an unintelligible sound. In this respect, the record is a far cry

from a high-art modernist aesthetics of noise of the kind joining futurism to *musique concrète*, to a Milanese institution like Milan's Studio di Fonologia, and beyond. In the case of *I fatti*, the pressure of praxis, the desire to use sound recording technology as a mode of political activism, acted as a point of resistance to this aesthetic impulse. Despite its contents, the record was presented not as music but as supposed evidence in a murder case. Portelli spoke, once again, to the record's still oddly hybrid nature when he remarked on how the record belonged to a time when

the function of long playing records . . . was aesthetic rather than scholarly, which is why the LP of the events in Milan had so few buyers and listeners (I myself have probably played it no more than a couple of times).<sup>51</sup>

Released in a format whose previous reputation had been prevalingly aesthetic, *I fatti* seems designed to loop its listeners endlessly, mercilessly, between two kinds of sensorial experiences: it is both urgent sonic proof and evident absence; useless as forensics and yet insufficient as an artistic object.

I would venture to say that *I fatti di Milano*'s insistence on proof, and the suspension between political and aesthetic purpose it produces, is not only a renunciation of the comforts that can be derived from the aesthetization of political events but also a reflection of an attitude toward law, evidence, and political responsibility typical of the *anni di piombo*, of which *I fatti* is the unmistakable product. The (impossible) quest for "proof" urged upon the listener speaks to a historical moment in which the anxiety of sonic representation was at one with the possibility of praxis.

So where, if anywhere, does this record belong, historically and politically? Cut some time between the collapse of the NCI as a musical enterprise and its co-option into the project of oral history, between aesthetic artifact and document, it sits uneasily everywhere and offers little comfort. From the vantage point of the discipline of sound studies understood as a critical discourse of orality, it offers a startling alternative to (or perhaps a mere proof ad absurdum of) the theologically inflected binaries of the Toronto School of Communication Theory, and a perspective on the long and perhaps never completed genesis of the idea of a reliable sound document. As an item of Italian history, it stands at the gateway of the *anni di piombo*, released a mere month after the event that marked their unofficial beginning: the bombing of Piazza Fontana of 12 December 1969. *I fatti* certainly shares some of the traits of, say, Dario Fo's *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (1970), insofar as it takes up an act of political violence and its unresolved status, or even Carlo Ginzburg's *Il giudice e lo storico* (1991), insofar as it aims to supplement, or even correct, legal proceedings and established opinion. But *I fatti* did not have the ambition, the clear purpose, and, perhaps most

important, the widespread reception of either of those works, and with good reason: it offered absolutely no resolution, aesthetic or legal, to the impossibility of proof. Within the NCI's history the record is but a glitch, a slight malfunction produced by the realignment of the collective's activities and production. But it is precisely this characteristic—of its being the product of a temporary ideological malfunction in a folk music collective, or of the collapse of political and legal accountability in the face of rising urban violence—that makes it so disturbing to anyone thinking not so much of music history, but of music and its imagined ancestor, “sound,” as a mode of writing history. By setting up the aural quest for proof and the simultaneous revelation of the staging involved in all proof, it doubly resists the production of a truth of any kind, locking us—whether we like it or not—into listening not *for*, but *to*, absence.

## Notes

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1. Giuseppe Saragat's telegram is quoted in full in Nanni Balestrini and Primo Moroni, *L'orda d'oro, 1968–1977: la grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa* (Milan, 1997). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
2. “Un brutale e ingiustificato intervento della polizia ha provocato i gravi incidenti verificatisi a Milano”; *L'Unità*, 20 November 1969, 4.
3. Ibid.: “Nel corso degli incidenti muore l'agente Annarumma, sicuramente nel corso di uno scontro con un'altra camionetta della polizia. Le foto e le testimonianze lo dimostrano chiaramente, ma ciò nonostante la responsabilità viene data ai dimostranti” (Over the course of the clashes, agent Annarumma died—definitely during the crash [of his vehicle] with another police van. Photos and witness accounts demonstrate this clearly, but the blame is to be laid on the demonstrators nonetheless).
4. The full statement from the Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions (CISL) was printed in *L'Unità*, 20 November 1969, 4: “L'insistenza provocatoria di gruppi estremisti—la cui provenienza diviene sempre più dubbia—provoca effetti negativi sull'azione dei lavoratori” (The insistent provocations of extremist groups—whose provenience is becoming ever more suspicious—has negative effects on the actions of the workers).
5. See Alessandro Silj, *Malpaese: criminalità, corruzione e politica nell'Italia della prima Repubblica, 1943–1994* (Rome, 1994), 94.
6. See Mario Tedeschi, *Il Borghese*, 20 November 1969, quoted in Giampaolo Pansa, *Le bombe di Milano* (Milan, 1970), 23.
7. An independently published gathering of judicial materials can be found in Solange Manfredi, *Il Golpe Borghese: in una lettera-testamento a firma Junio Valerio Borghese la “verità” sul golpe* (n.p., 2014); both the fact that the author self-published this, and the phrasing of the title give a sense of the climate of tentativity and paranoia that clings to historical work on these subjects. For an account written by a left-wing historian who lived through this period, see Anna Cento Bull, *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation* (New York, 2007); for a recent contemporary account and

- critical evaluation of the significance of the *golpe*, see Nicola Tonietti, “Un colpo di stato mancato? Il golpe Borghese e l’eversione nera in Italia,” *Diacronie* 27, no. 3 (2016).
8. The Wikileaks Kissinger cables released between 1973 and 1976 show that the United States kept a close watch on the repression of the extreme right in Italy. The cables exchanged between Italy and Washington in that period show that the United States was anxious about the legal trial of members of the far right, particularly when they were involved in the police force or national security. See, for instance, the cable of 15 January 1974: “THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COLONEL SPIAZZI’S ARREST (REPORTEDLY THE FIRST SUCH ARREST FOR SUBVERSION SINCE WW II INVOLVING A HIGH RANKING MILITARY OFFICER) IS THAT IT FUELS THE CAMPAIGN OF THE LEFT WING PRESS WARNING OF THE EXISTENCE OF NEO-FASCIST INFLUENCE AND SYMPATHIZERS IN THE POLICE, ARMED FORCES AND FOREIGN MINISTRY AND ARGUING THE NEED TO ROOT THEM OUT. . . . THE EMBASSY IS PREPARING AN AIRGRAM REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY RIGHT AND ON THE GOVERNMENT’S INCREASED WILLINGNESS IN RECENT MONTHS TO CRACK DOWN ON THEM”; WikiLeaks, Public Library of US Diplomacy, [https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1974ROME00566\\_b.html](https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1974ROME00566_b.html). In April 2013, the Italian weekly *L’Espresso* released a thread of stories led by Stefania Maurizi based on the Kissinger cables, which goes into some detail as to the US encouragement of the extreme right. For the beginning of the thread, see Stefania Maurizi, “WikiLeaks: le trame d’Italia,” *L’Espresso*, 8 April 2013, <http://espresso.repubblica.it/internazionale/2013/04/08/news/wikileaks-le-trame-d-italia-1.52840>. For an overview of Kissinger’s hostility toward—and alleged threats against—Aldo Moro, see Danilo Campanella, “La filosofia politica di Aldo Moro come spinta riformatrice per l’unità europea,” *Rivista di Studi Politici* 14, no. 3 (July–September 2012).
  9. Michael Taussig, “Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of History as a State of Siege,” *Social Text* 23 (Autumn–Winter 1989): 13.
  10. See Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Stanford, 1999), 2. I am here extending Gitelman’s concept, which concerns the reception of technological innovations such as recording technology, to the reception and representation (which is, as we will see, also mediated through recording technology) of a particular episode, its becoming “history.”
  11. This particular problem has led Pierpaolo Antonello to reconceptualize 1970s violence as a postmodern endeavor, stylized, performative, and ultimately disruptive of the boundary between event and representation. This new approach was launched most forcefully in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug (Oxford, 2009). I’d like to emphasize here that, as the Andreotti law passed in 1980 regarding the imprisonment of political activists shows, this aesthetics of irresolution and anxiety had a specific governmental function, namely, to pave the way for the institution of exceptional and often unconstitutional laws for the management of political dissent.
  12. See, for instance, *Storia di una foto. Milano, via De Amicis, 14 maggio 1977. La costruzione dell’immagine icona degli “anni di piombo,”* ed. Sergio Bianchi (Milan, 2011); *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy, 1969–2009*, ed. Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O’Leary (London, 2009).

- On cinematic representation, see Giacomo Lichtner, “‘Io so’: The Absence of Resolution as Resolution in Contemporary Italian Cinema about the ‘Years of Lead,’” *Modern Italy* 22, no. 2 (May 2017): 167–81.
13. The term “soundscape” deserves here to be treated with special historical awareness: it is unlikely that Gianni Bosio would have been aware of this (given the very separate realms of North American scholarship and Italian scholarship on music at this time), but Murray Schafer was launching his naturalist manifesto on the ecology of sound in these same years.
  14. Gianni Bosio, record sleeve note to *I fatti di Milano*, Dischi del Sole, collection Archivi Sonori, SdL/AS/7, 1970, 33  $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm.
  15. I wish to thank Stefano Arrighetti, director of the Istituto de Martino—archive of the Nuovo Canzoniere—for his assistance and attempts to track down the original tapes. Arrighetti has attempted, on behalf of the archive, to try to claim back the tapes, but Gianluca Maris has no recollection of them.
  16. Piero V. Scorti, *Storia dell’Avanti: 1896–1986* (Milan, 1986), 194; Luciano Barca, *Cronache dall’interno del vertice del PCI*, vol. 1, *Con Togliatti e Longo* (Soveria Mannelli, 2005), 456; Renzo Vanni, *Trent’anni di regime bianco* (Pisa, 1976), 209.
  17. The fade-in, along with the more obviously aestheticized aspects of the LP’s cover, might be heard as an unexpected cosmetic indulgence for a record meant to serve as evidence.
  18. *I fatti di Milano*, side A, 0’ 08” –0’ 26”.
  19. See Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, 1989), 141–48.
  20. See Gustave Le Bon, *La Psychologie des foules* (Paris, 1895); Cesare Lombroso’s remarks on crowds are to be found in his books on the etiology of crime, especially *L’uomo delinquente* (Milan, 1876), which in turn influenced Scipio Sighele’s more overt reflections on the relationship of community and crime in *La folla delinquente* (Turin, 1891) and *La delinquenza settaria* (Milan, 1897). Gavin Williams’s essay on the relationship of language to crowd in the Milanese futurist movement elucidates the relevance of this strain of fin de siècle sociology to twentieth-century modernist conceptions of noise. See his “A Voice in the Crowd: Futurism and the Politics of Noise,” *19th-Century Music* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 113–29.
  21. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, 1998).
  22. Personal interview with the artist, Milan, 24 June 2014.
  23. Alessandro Portelli, quoted in Cesare Bermanni, *Una storia cantata* (Milan, 1997), 140. Originally published as “Intervistare il movimento: il ‘68 e la storia orale,” *I giorni cantati*, no. 10–11 (September 1989): 28–29. Bermanni’s *Una storia cantata* is an invaluable and formidably articulate account of the NCI, often shaped in the form of a lively dialogue among a rich set of contemporary primary accounts.
  24. The term “marxismo di campagna,” and a critique of it, can be found in Gianni Bosio, “Uomo folklorico/uomo storico (relazione sull’attività dell’Istituto Ernesto de Martino, al luglio 1969),” quoted in Bermanni, *Una storia cantata*, 130. Bosio’s essay, whose original circulation was internal to the Istituto de Martino, was eventually published in the collection *L’intellettuale rovesciato: interventi e ricerche sulla emergenza d’interesse verso le forme di espressione e di organizzazione “spontanee” nel mondo popolare e proletario* (1975; reprint, Milan, 1998).
  25. See Giovanna Marini in “Curiosità e delusioni,” in *Le strade del folk*, ed. Ernesto Assante and Enzo Capua (Milan, 1981), 23–24.

26. Robert Leydi, *La musica dei primitivi: manuale di etnologia musicale* (Milan, 1961), 81.
27. See Bermiani, *Una storia cantata*, 25: “Era in realtà nelle intenzioni di Roberto Leydi di appaiare il repertorio popolare a quello colto e di portarlo in sale da concerto, cioè di entrare alla Piccola Scala, ampliando i circuiti popolari di cui usufruiva il Nuovo Canzoniere Italiano con quelli propri alla musica da concerto e presentando negli stessi concerti delle esecuzioni di musica popolare e delle esecuzioni di musica da concerto. Ma quello che soprattutto venne colto in quella sua proposta era che con la frequentazione delle sale da concerto a detrimento delle piazze si rischiava di snaturare la valenza politica di tutto il lavoro.”
28. For a critical survey of Bosio’s understanding of working-class culture, see John Foot, “Mass Cultures, Popular Cultures and the Working Class in Milan, 1950–1970,” *Social History* 24, no. 2 (May 1999): 134–57. For a remarkable recent appraisal of *operaismo* within the panorama of Italian political theory, see Dario Gentile, *Italian Theory: Dall’operaismo alla biopolitica* (Bologna, 2012).
29. A passage exemplifying the complexity of Antonio Gramsci’s position on folklore is the following, which begins with folklore as something that needs to be understood and superseded and ends with a vision of a contemporary culture in which the distinction between folklore and modernity is abolished: “Conoscere il ‘folklore’ significa pertanto per l’insegnante conoscere quali altre concezioni del mondo e della vita lavorano di fatto alla formazione intellettuale e morale delle generazioni più giovani, per estirparle e sostituirle con concezioni ritenute superiori. . . . Il folklore non dev’esser concepito come una bizzarria, una stranezza o un elemento pittoresco, ma come una cosa che è molto seria e da prendere sul serio. Solo così l’insegnamento sarà più efficiente e determinerà realmente la nascita di una nuova cultura nelle grandi masse popolari, cioè sparirà il distacco tra cultura moderna e cultura popolare o folklore”; Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin, 1975), 3:2314. The notebook in question is no. 27, entitled *Osservazioni sul “folklore,”* written in 1935 and found at 2309–19 of Gerratana’s edition.
30. The editorial history of Antonio Gramsci’s *Quaderni di prigione*, or *Prison Notebooks*, in English, is notoriously complex. The reason it’s worth remarking on this at all is that the mode of consumption of the notebooks, and indeed the purpose for which the notebooks were published in the first place, differs significantly from edition to edition. Gramsci wrote the notebooks without aiming for a monographic whole, indeed, without any plan or hope to publish them in his lifetime. After his death in 1937, and most important, after the end of the Fascist regime, the notebooks were anthologized thematically (under the supervision of Palmiro Togliatti, then leader of the Italian Communist Party) and published in their entirety as a series of six volumes by Turinese publisher Einaudi between 1948 and 1951. This edition was meant for a general public, but it also abridged and reorganized some material in order to make Gramsci appear more aligned with 1950s Italian Communism than he really was; this same edition would be reprinted by Editori Riuniti in 1977; it remains arguably the most influential edition for the generations who came of age between the 1950s and the 1970s. However, a second philological and critical edition curated by Valentino Gerratana for the Istituto Gramsci of Rome was published also by Einaudi in 1975. Anthologies of Gramsci’s prison notebooks were translated into English—though an equivalent of Gerratana’s effort, namely an integral critical edition, is not yet available in the English language.

31. See Alberto Mario Cirese, "Concezioni del mondo, filosofia spontanea e istinto di classe nelle 'osservazioni sul folklore' di Antonio Gramsci [1969–70]," "Gramsci ritrovato," special issue, *Lares* 74, no. 2 (May–August 2008): 467–98.
32. *Ibid.*, 479.
33. I am referring to notebook 29, written in 1935. It is interesting that, in the edition that Bosio and Leydi would have read from in the 1960s, Gramsci's considerations on language and his thoughts on folklore, though from different notebooks, were gathered into the same thematically organized volume. Bosio and Leydi read, literally, from the same book. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Felice Platone and Palmiro Togliatti, vol. 5, *Letteratura e vita nazionale* (Turin, 1948–51).
34. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, ed. Gerratana, 3:2341. The notebook in question is no. 29, *Note per una introduzione allo studio della grammatica*, written in 1935.
35. De Martino's fieldwork expeditions had indeed actively involved young music scholars like Diego Carpitella, who with Leydi would become one of the main figureheads of Italian ethnomusicology. For De Martino's critique of Benedetto Croce in anthropological terms, see *Il mondo magico: prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (Turin, 1948). De Martino's work with a multidisciplinary team including Diego Carpitella occurred in the years 1959–60 as part of the research for the book on southern mourning rituals, *La terra del rimorso* (Milan, 1961).
36. See Leydi, *La musica dei primitivi*, 89.
37. It is important that, as Bermiani reports, members of the NCI (himself included) thought of Dario Fo's work after *Ci ragiono e canto* as appropriating aspects of their own theater shows without crediting them. Indeed, Bermiani goes so far as to accuse Fo of alienating the NCI from their main source of mainstream political prestige and financial support, the PCI (the Italian Communist Party). See Bermiani, *Una storia cantata*, 124–25.
38. Franco Coggiola, quoted in Bermiani, *Una storia cantata*, 126. The original is an unpublished conference paper entitled "Relazione sull'attività dell'Istituto Ernesto de Martino al novembre 1973," given at the Convegno sugli studi etnomusicologici in Italia in Rome, 29 November–2 December 1973.
39. According to Bermiani, Leydi was invited to be the director of the Istituto Ernesto de Martino but firmly refused, and he took with him all the tapes he had made while working at NCI, so they couldn't form part of the new archive. See Bermiani, *Una storia cantata*, 26.
40. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago, 1995).
41. Bosio quoted in Bermiani, *Una storia cantata*, 129.
42. Diego Carpitella quoted in *ibid.*, 27; the original source is "La musica e l'etnomusica," in *La biennale di Venezia, annuario 1978: eventi del 1976–77*, curated by the archivio storico delle arti contemporanee (Venice, 1979), 1221–22.
43. Domenico Ferraro, *Roberto Leydi e il "Sentite buona gente": musiche e cultura nel secondo dopoguerra* (Rome, 2015). Ferraro's book is probably the most comprehensive and in-depth account not only of *Sentite buona gente* but also of the intellectual and political landscape that generated it in Milan and Rome. My focus here is much narrower and therefore less comprehensive. As I am attempting to detail a moment of rupture and unintelligibility (specifically, the LP *I fatti di Milano*) rather than positive production, I have had to focus on highlighting the tension and incompatibility between just two opposing political ontologies of music; the schism between these ontologies is what will eventually cause a spill into the realm of recorded sound events and questions of political violence.



44. Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop Journal* 12, no. 1 (October 1981): 97.
45. On the postenlightenment ideology of the dichotomy between city and countryside, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford, 1975).
46. Gianni Bosio, "Elogio del magnetofono" (1966), in *L'intellettuale rovesciato* (Milan, 1998), 157–66, 158: "Il registratore è strumento di molti e diversi confronti, pegno di nuove possibilità anche nell'ambito delle tradizionali discipline culturali. Accumula in maniera netta enormi quantità di materiale (realtà) e le fissa in modo permanente così come appaiono nel momento della fissazione."
47. *Ibid.*, 165.
48. Bosio comes closest to admitting the relationship between his suspended aural epistemology and the confusing results of his urban research in a posthumous annotation to "Elogio del magnetofono" dating from August 1967 and included in the version of the essay published in *L'intellettuale rovesciato*. See *ibid.*, 167: "Aggiungere all' Elogio del magnetofono le considerazioni sul marxismo delle campagne come inadatto alla ricerca urbana. La difficoltà della ricerca nella attuale città potrebbe essere in relazione al fatto che noi adoperiamo uno strumento d'indagine grezzo, come il marxismo delle campagne, in una realtà che è stravolta."
49. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC, 2003), 219.
50. I am here thinking especially of the soundscapes created by Steven Feld, in which any claim to objectivity is abandoned in favor of creative editing techniques, crafting a sonic narration of the event that is willfully presented as partial and subjective and created in active collaboration with the "inhabitants" of a particular soundscape.
51. Sandro Portelli, personal communication, 5 February 2015.