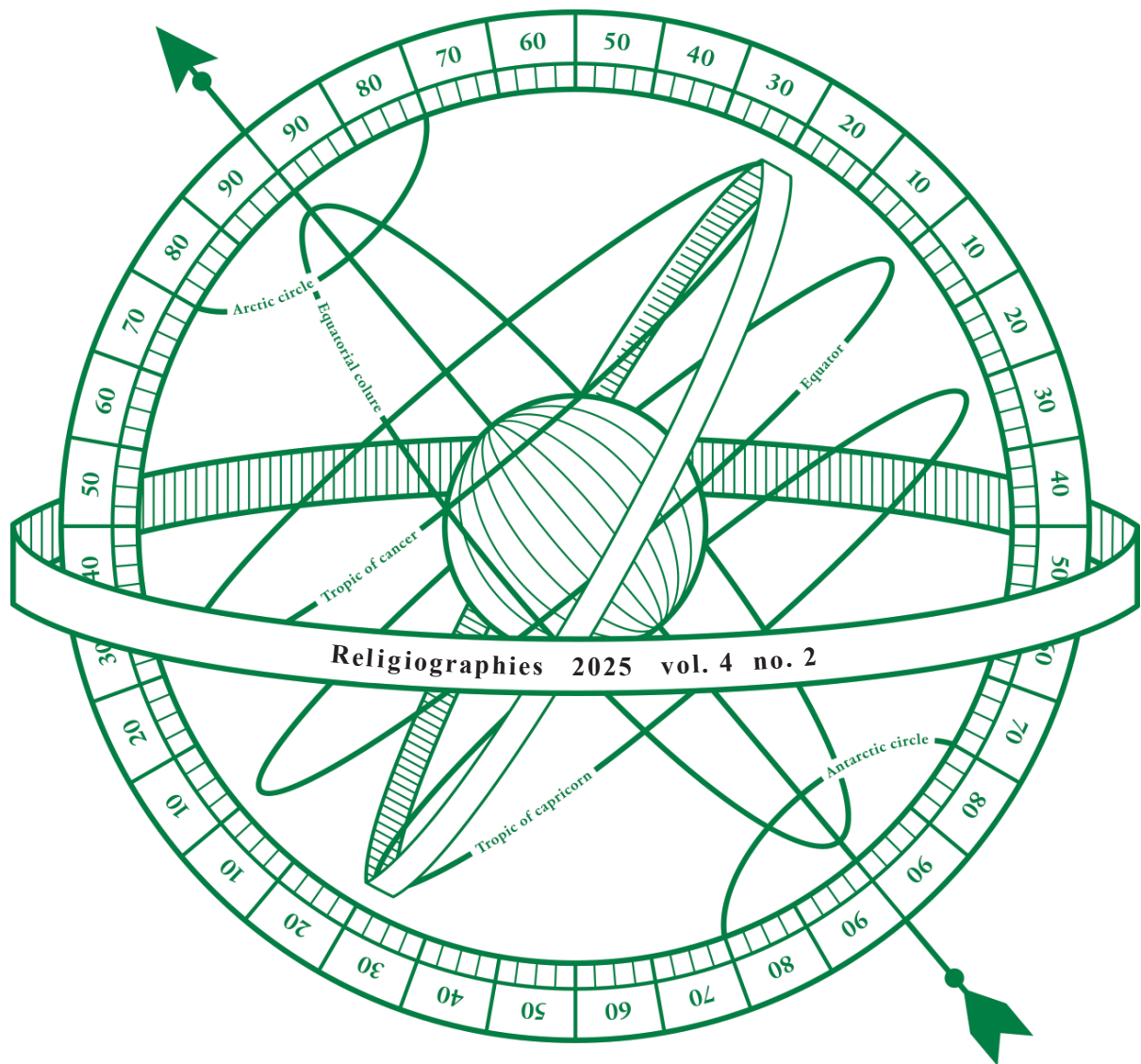


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“A Medianic Fact”: Occultural Radio Practices in Italy and Sweden

MATTEO POLATO

Author

Matteo Polato
Manchester Metropolitan University
m.polato@mmu.ac.uk

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Abstract

This article adopts a sonic-centered approach to the analysis of Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP): the occultural practice of communicating with otherworldly agencies via the use of audio technologies. The aim of this article is twofold. First, it introduces new research on an under-investigated aspect of paranormal studies: the rich and complex tradition of EVP practices that arose in Italy in the early 1970s. To do so, it traces the transfers between the Swedish origins of the practice and some relevant Italian cases, focusing on the sonic, experiential, and embodied dimension of such apocryphal modes of mediation. Second, it highlights an occultural resonance between the EVP practices within paranormal circles and their remediations in artistic contexts such as experimental music and sound art. This perspective will unveil a further transfer between Sweden and Italy. Common artistic approaches will emerge from the analysis of the practices of sound artists from both countries, whose work often displays deep intertwining between creative processes, occultural discourse, and performative engagement with the haunted histories of places.



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Introduction

This article adopts a sonic-centered approach to the analysis of Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP), occultural practices of communication with otherworldly agencies via the use of audio technologies. The study focuses on the embodied, affective, and performative dynamics of such practices, tracing mediation processes and sonic interactions. In this sense, the aim of the article is twofold. On one hand, it studies the transfer of discourses and methodologies between the Swedish origins of EVP practices and the under-researched Italian scene of practitioners, arising in the early 1970s. On the other hand, it highlights another, interrelated occultural transfer: the remediation of EVP practices within experimental music fields, where sound artists utilize EVP techniques and technologies as creative means of sound production, abstracted from their original metaphysical or spiritual meaning. In this context as well a relevant connection between Sweden and Italy will be outlined, ultimately unveiling unexpected material-discursive feedback between art and occulture.

A Brief History of Electronic Voice Phenomena

The expression “Electronic Voice Phenomena” is usually associated with a varied set of methods, techniques, and technologies aimed at receiving vocal transmissions that are interpreted as having paranormal origins. Among the most used devices are commercial radio receivers, crystal sets,¹ signal generators, and audio recorders. The fidelity of the technology is usually deliberately very low to maximize the occurrences of noises, distortions, and interferences that—while creating the ideal conditions for the emergence of ambiguous and mysterious sonic events—are considered the necessary source of energy used by the disembodied entities to modulate their messages in the physical domain. The methods of EVP communication are disparate and multifaceted, but two recurring trends can be shown. In the first, the process involves the audio recording of a sound feed. Portions of the recording are then successively listened to in search of vocal fragments interpreted as messages from the beyond. In the second, the process happens in real time, with the performance of a two-way communication happening between the experimenter and the audio feed from a radio receiver.

The idea of radio communication with spirits of the deceased can be traced back to the origins of wireless research, and should be considered within the discursive connections between the paranormal and resonance-based processes, introduced by early pioneers of radio science and psychical research such as Oliver Lodge,² William Crookes,³ or Harry Price.⁴ However, the conceptualization of an actual practice to communicate via radio with spectral voices can be traced back to the late 1940s, with the American experiments of Attila Von Szalay and Raymond Bayless.⁵ It is, however, with the experiments conducted by Friedrich Jürgenson from 1959 on, and the successive formalizations operated by Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive in the 1960s, that the practice was brought to the mainstream, leading to global dissemination. From the 1970s on, numerous practitioners could be found in the United Kingdom—such as Peter Bander⁶—and in the

1

An early form of passive radio receiver now popular among DIY enthusiasts and makers, characterized by a poor tuning selectivity and a general low-fidelity reception.

2

Oliver Lodge, *The Survival of Man: A Study in Unrecognised Human Faculty* (London: Methuen & Company, 1909).

3

William Crookes, “On Radiant Matter,” *Journal of the Franklin Institute* 108, no. 5 (1879): 305–16.

4

Harry H. Price, “Presidential Address: Haunting and the ‘Psychic Ether’ Hypothesis; With some Preliminary Reflections on the Present Condition and Possible Future of Psychical Research,” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 45, no. 160 (1938): 308–46.

5

For a detailed history of EVP see Steven T. Parsons and Cooper E. Callum, *Paracoustics: Sound & the Paranormal* (Guildford: White Crow Books, 2015).

6

Peter Bander, *Carry on Talking: How Dead Are the Voices?* (London: Smythe, 1972).

United States as well, with the research of Sarah Wilson Estep and the American Association of EVP. Later, from the 1980s on, George Meek and William O’Neill impacted the discourse with the invention of the Spiricom, a signal generator allegedly capable of mediating real-time conversations with spirits. In 2002, Frank Sumption released the so-called Ghost Box, a hacked radio receiver that would quickly become an almost ubiquitous tool in contemporary paranormal investigation, and which recently gained renewed popularity with the so-called “Estes Method,” introduced in the independent online docuseries *Hellier* (produced by Planet Weird in 2019).

This brief and partial list demonstrates how much the history of sonic media has always been deeply intertwined with the modern discourse on occultural practices, famously defined by Partridge as “those often hidden, rejected and oppositional beliefs and practices associated with esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism, and a range of other subcultural beliefs and practices.”⁷ The importance of the practices of EVP within occultural communities—in particular ghost hunting groups and paranormal investigators—has attracted academic research, such as the studies of Jeffrey Sconce,⁸ Anthony Enns,⁹ or Richard J. Hand,¹⁰ to name just a few. The majority of the research recognizes the contribution of the two Swedish/Latvian initiators—Jürgenson and Raudive—and focuses its analysis on their influence on the English-speaking world. Conversely, there is little academic literature on relevant cases outside the United Kingdom and the United States.¹¹ This paper aims at partially filling this gap by focusing on the transfers and the influences between Sweden and Italy, where a wide network of practitioners began to emerge from the 1970s on. As the article will demonstrate, the study of the Italian case not only sheds light on the influence of the Swedish originators, but also manifests specific evolutions and transformations of the practice, operated in Italy, that can extend the understanding of EVP discourse at large. The Italian case, and its connections with the Swedish origins of the practice, takes on a particular relevance here, among the multiple instances of the EVP discourse emerging in Europe from the 1970s on. As will be highlighted below, there was a direct intervention of the originator Jürgenson in Italy, influencing the Italian scene in ways rarely found in other regional EVP milieus. At the same time, the occultural transfers between the Swedish and the Italian scenes of EVP were intended as a case study whose analysis could provide a framework applicable to the broader context of paranormal discourse. In particular, this paper proposes a focus on the experiential and embodied dynamics of occulture, less concerned with the dimension of belief or representation and more with praxis.¹² It thus looks into the ways of *doing* occulture through often apocryphal and non-normative interactions with technology, with perception, and with performance. In this sense, the first part of the article—exploring the discursive and methodological transfers between Swedish and Italian practitioners—will explore occultural modes of considering, interpreting, and interacting with material sonic events. In the second part, the analysis of sound artists inspired by occulture will highlight the continuous remediation of occultural experiences and performances in the arts, demonstrating how practiced occulture is intrinsically and irreducibly a creative practice.

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Christopher Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 2004), 1:68.

8

Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

9

Anthony Enns, “Voices of the Dead: Transmission/ Translation/Transgression,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 46, no. 1 (2005): 11–27.

10

Richard J. Hand, “Spirits on the Air: Ghosts, Sound, and the Radio,” in *The Routledge Handbook to the Ghost Story*, ed. Scott Brewster and Luke Thurston (London: Routledge, 2017), 370–77.

11

Relevant research in this context, for instance, is the work of Diana Espirito Santo and Gonzalo Barcelo, “New Media and the Digitized Paranormal: Instrumentation, Affective Atmospheres, and the Production of History in Chile,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 27, no. 2 (2021): 321–39.

12

Nina Kokkinen, “Occulture as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Art,” *Aries* 13, no. 1 (2013): 24.

Theoretical Framework

In studying EVP phenomena, the aim of the article is not so much “to seek out ultimate causes or foundational agencies, [. . .] to establish the ‘truth’ of this or that strange event, but [. . .] instead trace their mobile emergence in order to enliven our senses to the movement of the new and new movements.”¹³ Instead of focusing on the representational, the semiotic, and the linguistic elements of the alleged paranormal communications, the investigation will be concerned with their experiential aspects and how they emerge through relational configurations between subjects, technologies, and discourses, all mediated by specific sonic interactions. In other words, the occultural practices of Electronic Voice Phenomena will be considered as material-discursive processes that create the conditions for charging specific sonic phenomena with the potentiality of an intentional and invisible agency behind them.

To begin an interpretation of occulture based on material practices and experiential processes, a fruitful epistemological move is to consider the pre-representational dynamics of such experiences, and to shift from a problem of the representation of the supernatural *entity*, which allegedly intervenes in EVP practices, to how *agency* is constructed and embodied through sonic practices. In this sense, Mark Fisher’s conceptualization of the eerie is a relevant starting point defined as a “question of agency of the immaterial and the inanimate”¹⁴ that arises from a “failure”¹⁵ of clear onto-epistemological separation between presence and absence of agency, and between signal and noise. To further expand on such an agential approach, the concept of the eerie will be related to that of the affective atmosphere, formulated within non-representational theories as the expression of “something vague [. . .] that exceeds rational explanation and clear figuration, something that hesitates at the edge of the unsayable.”¹⁶ The concept of atmosphere is particularly relevant in the context of this research as it is defined as being “neither solely located in material environment nor solely in the human body, but emerging from the resonances between its various components.”¹⁷ It thus provides a useful theoretical foundation to the observation of peripheral intensities—in between the subjective and the externally perceived—such as those produced within the practice of EVP.

Fisher claims that the eerie is particularly related to marginal and subtle feelings and modes of perception, and that “the shift to sound opens up the eerie.”¹⁸ Sound, in this sense, is understood as the mediation process that creates the conditions for the atmosphere of the eerie to emerge. Listening will therefore be conceived as a fundamentally relational process,¹⁹ in which listeners “do not merely occupy a space or a context, they are constitutive of the context set to sound-making.”²⁰ It is through this ecological conceptualization of listening that the sonic will be highlighted in its capability to produce, amplify, and modulate the sensation of the eerie, paving the way for the experience of the paranormal: “Listening I hear the possibility of life-worlds that are not delineated by the visible but conjured from the invisible in sound, whose actuality is negotiated continually rather than assumed.”²¹

Listening is thus conceived as a fundamentally active process that is productive of the eerie question of agency, as well as of the agential

13

Julian Holloway, “On the Spaces and Movement of Monsters: The Itinerant Crossings of Gef the Talking Mongoose,” *Cultural Geographies* 24, no. 1 (2017): 35.

14

Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2017), 11.

15

Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 61.

16

Ben Anderson, “Affective Atmospheres,” *Emotion, Space and Society* 2, no. 2 (2009): 78.

17

Christoph Michels, “Researching Affective Atmospheres,” *Geographica Helvetica* 70, no. 4 (2015): 257.

18

Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 81.

19

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

20

Agostino Di Scipio, “The Politics of Sound and the Biopolitics of Music: Weaving Together Sound-making, Irreducible Listening, and the Physical and Cultural Environment,” *Organised Sound* 20, no. 3 (2015): 285.

21

Salomé Voegelin, *Sonic Possible Worlds* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 37.

relationships between EVP experimenter and the felt invisible entity at the other side of the audio device. In this sense, the EVP practice will be read through Barad's agential realism,²² where agency "is an enactment, not something someone or something has."²³ According to Barad, "[. . .] individually determinate entities do not exist [. . .]. A phenomenon is a specific intra-action of an 'object' and the 'measuring agencies'; the object and the measuring agencies emerge from, rather than precede, the intra-action that produces them."²⁴ To conclude, listening is a process from which distinctions between noise and communication, or between random interference and otherworldly agency emerge. These theoretical viewpoints will guide the next section's analysis of the two fundamental originators of the EVP discourse, as well as the comparison with some relevant cases of Italian EVP practitioners.

Friedrich Jürgenson

Friedrich Jürgenson (1903–1987) was an artist, writer, documentarist, and classically trained singer. He was born in Odessa to a family of Estonian origins, but moved to Sweden in his childhood, where he lived for the rest of his life. He is widely recognized as the initiator of the practice of EVP, through decades-long experimentations whose beginnings are reported in his book *Sprechfunk mit Verstorbenen (Radio Communication with the Dead)*,²⁵ first published in German in 1967. In the book, Jürgenson tells of his first experience with disembodied voices, dated June 1959, during a spring vacation spent in a cottage in the Swedish countryside. On that day, inspired by the blossoming aliveness of the nature all around, Jürgenson installed a microphone at his studio's window, to record the song of a chirping finch. Playing back the magnetic tape, however, the artist was left aghast:

What I heard was very strange. I was hearing a roaring or hissing static sound, like a shower, in which you could identify the chirping of the finch, but as if it was coming from a distance. [. . .] Then all of a sudden there sounded a trumpet solo as if to announce something. I listened with continued surprise as suddenly a male voice began to speak in Norwegian. Though it was very quiet, I could clearly understand the words. The man was talking about "bird songs at night," and I heard a number of chattering, whistling and splashing sounds, and among them what seemed to be the chirping of a sparrow. Suddenly the bird choir fell silent and with that so did the hissing sound. In the next instant the twittering of a finch was audible and in the distance you could hear a titmouse—the tape recorder was working perfectly again. But what had actually happened? The fact was totally clear to me; this was a Norwegian radio broadcast. [. . .] Of course there is the possibility that under certain circumstances a tape recorder can act as a radio receiver. But—wasn't it remarkable, that I of all people who was searching for bird sounds should receive sounds of Norwegian night birds exactly in that moment when I turned on the tape recorder? Was there an invisible intelligence that with such a remarkable way was trying to get my attention? Very puzzling!²⁶

22

Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

23

Karen Barad, "Agential Realism: Feminist Interventions in Understanding Scientific Practices," in *The Science Studies Reader*, ed. Mario Biagioli (New York: Routledge, 1999), 7.

24

Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 145.

25

Friedrich Jürgenson, *Sprechfunk mit Verstorbenen, Praktische Kontaktherstellung mit dem Jenseits* (Hamburg: H. Bauer Verlag, 1967).

26

Friedrich Jürgenson, *Voice Transmissions with the Deceased* (Stockholm: Firework Edition, 2004), 14, <https://archive.org/details/JurgensonVoiceTransmissionsWithTheDeceased>.

This is the event that would trigger Jürgenson's interest in the possibility of obtaining otherworldly communications via audio media, effectively laying the groundwork for the beginnings of the practice of EVP. However, although certainly constituting an archetypical EVP experience, some particularities are also displayed that are almost absent from the accounts of later experimenters. In particular, it is interesting to note the role of sound in the experience: while the voice certainly represents the climax of the event, it is preceded and somehow prepared by ambiguous and mysterious sonic phenomena, whose source Jürgenson failed to recognize. It is from these very sounds that the potentiality of the supernatural emerges, by making the experiencer question the nature of such occurrences and by effectively introducing that "question of agency"²⁷ at the source of the eerie.

Moreover, in Jürgenson's writings the paranormal voice is often preceded by inexplicable behaviors of the tape recorder itself. These are sonic and vibratory events that are not semiotically organized, but instead carry intensities which are bodily felt even before being perceived by the ears: "I'm standing closely hunched over the rotating tape and suddenly feel a prickling and shivering on my face, spreading to my neck and down to my hands. It was as if I was in the middle of some vibrating electricity."²⁸

In these cases, Jürgenson's recollections focus on the expressivity of such events, on their physical intensity, which is felt as affective "resonation, or interference pattern,"²⁹ and interpreted as a form of primordial, non-verbal communication: "The equipment was giving off a series of deafening sounds. Should I consider that as an answer? The sounds were going right through my bones and the tape recorder was visibly vibrating."³⁰

Glimpses of this wild and unexpected sonic world shine through Jürgenson's recordings, released in 2000 by Ash International with the compilation *From the Studio for Audioscopic Research*. The audio tapes are noisy, distorted, with vocal fragments submerged in buzzes and waves of sound. At times, it is possible to hear distant whispers, voices, even music and choirs, coming from interfering broadcasts, which quickly get filtered away or superimposed on one another. It is from this chaotic sonic aliveness that Jürgenson first *felt* the intervention of otherworldly agencies, then heard fragments of messages that he interpreted as seemingly related to his life, his research, his loved ones. The noise and sound textures thus construct a temporary interactive space, a different territory where different agencies dwell and can be heard. Within this field of peripheral vibratory relationships and embodied interactions, the normal affordances of the tape recorder are transfigured, and the technology seems to behave almost autonomously, or moved by some invisible agency, thus producing the sensation of the eerie leading to the interpretation of noisy interferences as intentional communications.

Initially, the technological apparatus used by Jürgenson was a tape recorder connected to a microphone, placed in the middle of an empty room, recording the silence of the space in search of subtle modulations inaudible to the human ear. As hypothesized by Jürgenson himself, most of the recorded acoustic phenomena were radio waves interfering with the device's electronics: a natural phenomenon that

27

Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 11.

28

Jürgenson, *Voice Transmissions with the Deceased*, 30.

29

Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 14.

30

Jürgenson, *Voice Transmissions with the Deceased*, 30.

was conceived as modulated by paranormal forces. Successively, after a suggestion channeled by the spectral voices themselves, Jürgenson moved to a radio receiver tuned in between frequencies, in zones of the electromagnetic spectrum where the lack of commercial broadcasts left room for the invisible spirits to freely intervene. In both the tape recorder and the radio configurations, the practice was slow and solitary: Jürgenson began by addressing potential spirits and asking questions, and started recording a portion of tape. He then played it back multiple times, listening deeper and deeper to separate any potential signal from noise, and to isolate the faint vocal fragments drowned in the distorted waves of radio sound. As Jürgenson recognized, his musically trained ear was an important aid for this “difficult task of listening.”³¹

It was here that my many years of voice and music training became useful, I would even say indispensable. [. . .] In this way my hearing was calibrated in such a way as to discriminate subtle differences among the most varied vocal timbres.³²

These “hours of concentrated listening”³³ delineate a process in which the “sonorous experience is central to enchantment,”³⁴ in particular when the senses are attuned to a “cultivated form of perception, a discerning and meticulous attentiveness to the singular specificity of things.”³⁵ This dimension of listening is in Jürgenson’s approach a necessary condition, which, as will be highlighted below, will be maintained in successive iterations of the practice of EVP, formalized in particular by Jürgenson’s direct successor, Konstantin Raudive.

Konstantin Raudive

Konstantin Raudive (1909–1974) was a Latvian psychologist and professor at Uppsala University who was exiled to Sweden after the soviet occupation of Latvia in 1944. He is probably the most famous name in the context of EVP, thanks to the wide diffusion of his 1968 book *Unhörbares wird hörbar*,³⁶ translated into English in 1971 as *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead*.³⁷ Raudive, a former student of Carl Jung, had a lifelong interest in parapsychology. He began to experiment with spectral voices in 1964, after reading Jürgenson’s writings and subsequently establishing a personal collaboration with the artist. While Jürgenson can be considered the originator of the “classical” method of EVP, it is with Raudive’s *Breakthrough* that techniques and methodologies became formalized, even providing electronic schemes for the construction of audio devices. In his experiments, Raudive utilized the techniques introduced by Jürgenson, such as the tape recorder, and the radio tuned to “‘inter-frequency’ where nothing but a general atmospheric static noise would be audible.”³⁸ However, one of the most famous contributions by Raudive is a self-made circuit—simply called “the diode”—designed in 1968 and widely diffused among paranormal investigators in the following decades. The diode circuit reproduced the structure of early crystal radio receivers, whose tuning component was characterized by a bad selectivity that maximized the interference between

31
Jürgenson, *Voice Transmissions with the Deceased*, 30.

32
Jürgenson, 104.

33
Jürgenson, 19.

34
Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 36.

35
Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, 37.

36
Konstantin Raudive, *Unhörbares wird hörbar* (Regen: Reichl, 1968).

37
Konstantin Raudive, *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1971).

38
Raudive, *Breakthrough*, xvii.

signals, paving the way for unexpected sonic phenomena to emerge.

Moreover, Raudive's book defined an interpretative and methodological episteme, seminal for many successive practitioners. Although the influence of Jürgenson is clear in the way the psychologist used radio technologies and audio recording devices, Raudive's writings revealed a different onto-epistemological perspective, repositioning the Swedish artist's original techniques within an experimental apparatus focused on scientific accuracy and the reproducibility of results. Raudive's methods manifested a clear distancing from Jürgenson's original aesthetical, almost artistic approach, substituting it with a rationalistic angle pertaining to the field of parapsychology. This is most evident in a profoundly different consideration of the role of the voice in the EVP recordings of the two practitioners. In Jürgenson, the voice phenomena represented only a portion of the enchanted and mysterious sonic world that the practitioner accessed through a creative use of the recorder and the radio. As for Raudive, his experiments were entirely focused on analytically assessing the credibility of the recordings, in search of voices as objective evidence of the survival of human consciousness after death:

The concrete results of this new method of research give substance to the assertion that the voices can be defined as belonging to transcendental beings. They appear as independent acoustic shapes that can be determined by a number of basic, characteristic features. This means that we can recognise the phenomenon in its acoustic manifestation.³⁹

In Raudive's interpretation of the phenomenon, the disembodied agencies intervening in the audio technology could manipulate the energy of the incoming electromagnetic waves, which they transformed into vocal fragments by manipulating their frequential content. Therefore, the low fidelity of the communication and the distortions that affected the recordings were considered constitutive elements for the phenomenon to occur.

Voice was the main object of interest for Raudive and was considered para-normal but "of an *objective, physical-acoustic nature*."⁴⁰ The vocal fragment captured on tape was conceived as a sonic object to be isolated from the rest and, once again through hyper-focused listening sessions, to be perceptually extracted from the noise. Raudive took the interpretative process initiated by Jürgenson to extremes, with a procedure in which "the original tape is re-recorded on to another tape and this process is repeated at least five times. [. . .] It is for this reason that a recording of, for instance, ten minutes, may take ten hours to analyse and verify."⁴¹ Raudive stated that "the verification of the voices depends on repetition, and the ear cannot hear the voices without technical aids."⁴² the experimental apparatus he set in motion involved audio technologies as much as human intervention.

In this sense, the "difficult task of listening"⁴³ became an even more productive act, a way to deterritorialize the noisy recordings from their everyday meaning and recontextualize them through different auditory affordances, to focalize on otherwise overheard peripheral sonic events and produce the sensation of an intentional agency at

39
Raudive, *Breakthrough*, 19.

40
Raudive, 8. Italics mine.

41
Raudive, 19.

42
Raudive, 18.

43
Jürgenson, *Voice Transmissions with the Deceased*, 19.

work behind them. Raudive's technologies were fundamentally malfunctioning radio receivers, tuning circuits (the diode) with no selectivity and thus incapable of properly isolating a specific carrier from the incoming spectrum of electromagnetic signals. The tuning component thus *shifted* from the radio receiver to the experimenter himself, who, through repetitive focused listenings, was effectively *the* component that filtered the voice from the noise, selecting certain sonic phenomena in place of others, and transforming interference fragments into meaningful messages. The radio medium itself was extended and completed by the experimenter's auditory apparatus and their psychoacoustic capabilities: the human and the technological element of the process had to coexist and resonate together for the spectral voice to come into existence. Barad stated that an apparatus of measurement "enacts a cut delineating the object from the agencies of observation"⁴⁴ and that this "agential cut enacts a causal structure among components of a phenomenon in the marking of the 'measuring agencies' ('effect') by the 'measured object' ('cause')."⁴⁵ The apparatus of experimentation created the conditions for specific phenomena to emerge, and the voices came into existence as autonomous agencies separated from the listener only through the experiment itself.

44
Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 131.

45
Barad, 140.

The Italian Case

With the diffusion of their books, the experiences of Jürgenson and Raudive received international exposure, becoming the global blueprint for the practice of EVP. However, even if most of the successive instances of the practice inherited elements of both, relevant differences can be found in the modes and extent of the two researchers' influences on the evolution of the practice. This is due to the publishing history of their writings, and to the extent of their personal involvement with specific practitioners and groups. On one hand, Raudive's book *Unhörbares wird hörbar*, initially published in German in 1968, came out in an early English edition in 1971—released by Colin Smythe under the title of *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead*. It became the first publication of its kind in English, impacting the budding scenes in the United Kingdom and the United States with its scientific and vocal-centered approach. Jürgenson's writings would not appear in English until 2004, with the publication of *Voice Transmissions with the Deceased*, by Fireworks Editions, whose small-scale release was part of a monographic exhibition on the late artist's work on EVP.

46
Konstantin Raudive, *Voci dall'aldilà* (Firenze: Todeschi, 1973).

47
Friedrich Jürgenson, *Dialoghi con l'aldilà* (Milano: Armenia, 1977).

However, while virtually unknown among the English-speaking community for decades, Jürgenson became particularly influential in other areas, and particularly in Italy, thanks to his frequent professional and personal exchanges with the country. The artist had a deep connection with Italy throughout his life; he conducted multiple excavations in Pompeii, and worked as a painter in the Vatican City, painting the portrait of two Popes, Pius XII and Paul VI. During his travels, he contacted Italian EVP practitioners, who started to grow in number from the early 1970s on, thanks to the Italian publication of Raudive's book as *Voci dall'aldilà*⁴⁶ (1971) and Jürgenson's *Dialoghi con l'aldilà* (1976).⁴⁷ Jürgenson had the opportunity to personally

intervene in the budding Italian EVP community throughout the 1970s and 1980s, participating in numerous conferences on the topic, as well as establishing personal collaborations with various experimenters. Many Italian practitioners mention Jürgenson not only as the initial inspirator for their practice, but also as an active interlocutor, even personally intervening in their experimental sessions. As will be highlighted below, Jürgenson appears to have influenced the Italian case with his personal approach, which often evolved into unique forms of practice and discourse.

From the early 1970s on, a varied and active network of practitioners could be found in Italy, usually gathered around local groups and collectives: for instance, Roberto Magani's Gruppo Sperimentale per l'Audizione Metafonica in Udine; the Roman CRAM—Centro Romano Ascolto Metafonico; the Milan CeMM—Centro Metafonico di Milano; and the Centro Psicofonico di Grosseto. They developed around the influential figure of Marcello Bacci. In this context, numerous books focused on EVP—or, as it is often termed in Italy, “metaphonia” or “psychophonia”—were published.⁴⁸ Generally, these publications reveal a strong influence of Jürgenson's original approach and techniques, and it is possible to find a reemergence of the aesthetic and creative dimension of the recorded sounds, which was lost in Raudive's scientifically inspired experiments.

However, Italian EVPs have unique characteristics, which are worth mentioning to better contextualize the case studies below. First, there seems to be in Italy a closer connection with Spiritualism, with the EVP practitioners often becoming interested in the voice phenomena after being active among séance circles. Second, a particular recurrent theme is the approach to such paranormal practices in search of a possibility to contact departed loved ones. In fact, what seems to trigger many experiments with EVP in Italy is a personal loss, and the need to overcome grief by finding solace in tangible demonstrations of the survival of the soul: as practitioner Alvisi declared, the research on EVP is “born out of grief.”⁴⁹ Third, it is interesting to notice a closer vicinity to religious belief and Catholicism in particular. There are cases of priests directly interested in EVP, with the figure of Father Pellegrino Ernetti (1925–1994) who is a particularly relevant example: a Benedictine monk, notorious exorcist, as well as an academic in the field of musicology and pre-polyphonic and medieval vocal music. Ernetti was known in the field of the paranormal due to the alleged invention of the so-called Chronovisor, a screen-based time machine considered capable of materializing images of past events by tuning to the residual vibratory echoes of voices and actions of the past. Relevantly, Ernetti was also active in EVP research after an event in September 1952, thus predating Jürgenson's first experience of 1959. Brune and Chauvin⁵⁰ report the event, in which Ernetti and Father Agostino Gemelli—psychologist and founder of the Catholic University in Milan—were conducting music recordings on magnetic wire to “filter Gregorian chants to eliminate harmonics,”⁵¹ when a voice—recognized by Father Gemelli as that of his deceased father—emerged in the recordings, establishing a conversation with the two priests. This event, although isolated, would nonetheless contribute to the early formation of the Italian scene of EVP practitioners, in particular the Milan-based Virginia Ursi, analyzed below.

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For instance: Colaciuri and Marco Foresti, *E.A.P. Voci paranormali al registratore: Teoria generale e tecniche di applicazione* (Milano: Galatea Editrice, 1973); Gabriella Alvisi, *Le voci dei viventi di ieri* (Milano: Sugar Company, 1978); Various Authors, *Voci dall'invisibile* (Milano: Armenia, 1978); Carlo M. Trajna, *Ignoto chiama uomo* (Milano: Salani, 1980); Marcello Bacci, *Il mistero delle voci dell'aldilà*, con audiocassetta (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1985).

49

Virginia Ursi, *Tra noi e loro l'arcobaleno* (Terni: Hermes Edizioni, 1998), 17, translation of the author.

50

François Brune and Rémy Chauvin, *In diretta dall'aldilà: La transcomunicazione strumentale: realtà o utopia?* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1955).

51

Brune and Chauvin, *In diretta dall'aldilà*, 39, translation by the author.

Marcello Bacci

Marcello Bacci (1927–2019) had been the pivotal figure of the Centro Psicofonico di Grosseto since the early 1970s, and gained international notoriety due to his peculiar approach to EVP, as well as the extraordinary quality and clarity of his channeled voices. Bacci's interest in the paranormal began in the late 1940s within Spiritualist circles in London, but it was the discovery of Jürgenson's work that sparked his interest in experimenting with EVP. Over the years, Bacci and Jürgenson even established a personal friendship and collaboration, as demonstrated by the preface that Jürgenson himself wrote for Bacci's book: "With regard to Marcello Bacci's research and achievements, I would particularly like to emphasise and argue that they are of exceptional importance, as his recordings of 'voices' are limpid and extremely clear to interpret."⁵²

Bacci's initial practice was indebted to Jürgenson's approach, first exploring the various techniques on the tape recorder, and then settling on the use of a vacuum tube radio receiver. The Swede's influence is particularly evident in Bacci's strong a-technical and a-scientific position regarding the role of technology. In contrast with the engineering and scientific paradigm proposed by Raudive, Bacci's approach resonates with Jürgenson's poetic and enchanted epistemology of the voice phenomenon as a supernatural, inexplicable occurrence, which fundamentally undermines the ordinary technical functioning of the radio device:

What is a radio? A radio is [just] a means of communication, [the spirits] know it. Where they come from, who they are, what they do, how do they come here: it's a medianic fact. When I say "medianic," I'm saying everything: we don't know how these phenomena happen. Therefore, you could even remove a tube from the radio, and we already did all the tests: we have removed all the three tubes of this radio.⁵³

The paranormal nature of the phenomenon is performatively instantiated, with Bacci physically removing the tubes—electronic components necessary for the functioning of the radio—to demonstrate the persistence of the voice phenomena:

By turning the tuning knob during the manifestation of "voices," they do not disappear. This means that the circuits intended for the reception and detection of radio waves are functioning anomalously: overwhelmed, as they were, by an unknown energy "field" that seems to use only low-frequency [acoustic] circuits.⁵⁴

Radio circuits are therefore "overwhelmed" by an unknown energy that bypasses radio tuning and the demodulation, intervening directly on the acoustic processes. It almost seems as if the radio had lost its technological and material qualities, to become instead a performative and discursive device, a pure mediation process unbounded by physical rules and instead obeying the realm of the imaginary. Radio

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Friedrich Jürgenson, foreword to *Il mistero delle voci dell'aldilà*, 8, translation by the author.

53

Guido Ferrari, "Marcello Bacci. Voci dell'aldilà. Documentario di Guido Ferrari, 2000," Guido Ferrari, documentary, 2018, YouTube Video, 5:20, <https://youtu.be/3YwecCZ0XHc?si=v10hxHm1x-EZo-Yh5>, translation by the author.

54

Bacci, *Il mistero delle voci dell'aldilà*, 16.

communication is thus subverted in its foundations, making it what Thacker defines as a dark medium, a medium that, while effectively malfunctioning from a rational-deterministic perspective, “works too well,” mediating between “different ontological domains,”⁵⁵ thus acting as a portal in which “a media object [. . .] serves as a passageway or conduit between the natural and supernatural.”⁵⁶ The components of the device—the tuner, necessary to establish a communication channel with a broadcasting station, and the detector, the component used for the demodulation of the radio signal into sound—lose their role and their function. The usual affordances of radio communication are thus disrupted, with the radio becoming itself a “black box” operating through a “medianic fact.”

In this context, Bacci’s performative apparatus distanced itself from most of the experiments conducted by Jürgenson, as well as his successors. The complete subversion of the mediation process freed Bacci’s voices from the dialectics between signal and noise that was constitutive of the process detailed by Jürgenson and Raudive. Indeed, by considering the otherworldly agencies as able to directly intervene upon the radio receiver—independently from any technical constraint—Bacci freed the spirits from the necessity of modulating human-made broadcasts and noise to make their messages perceptible to the ear. The consequence of this important paradigm shift is that Bacci’s voices, for the first time overcoming the necessity of the technology’s low-fidelity, were no longer fragmented, distorted, or obscure, but instead expressed their messages in full sentences and semantic consistency with unprecedented clarity and articulation. It is therefore the first time in which the necessity of trained, fine-tuned listening is lost, and with it the painstaking listening repetitions to slowly attune the ear to the noise, thus extracting the meaning of the channeled words. Moreover, the high-fidelity transmission of the voices, their conversational clarity, and the immediacy of their reception allow for a real-time interaction and a true two-way “dark” communication between the physical and the paranormal plane:

The typical fragmentariness of [EVPs]—isolated words and short phrases found on magnetic tape—constitutes the start of each session [. . .]. But they soon turn into continuous voices directly audible to the audience [. . .]. As in a normal radio audition, verbal productions (sometimes also musical choruses) are heard [. . .]. Sometimes there is a dialogue with the participants in the session, as if using a transceiver.⁵⁷

The important implication of such phenomena is a novel collective dimension of the EVP practice, where the experimenters are joined by an audience that actively participates in a communal, performative experience of mourning and enchantment. Grosseto’s Psychophonic Centre where Bacci and his collaborators operated was the scene of actual collective rituals where dozens of members of the local community gathered to hear the “miracle” of the voices and, most of all, to have a chance for a brief conversation with deceased loved ones.

In a typical session, the audience would sit in rows of chairs organized as in a concert room, all facing the old radio placed on a ta-

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Eugene Thacker, “Dark Media,” in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*, ed. Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 102.

56

Thacker, “Dark Media,” 130.

57

Bacci, *Il mistero delle voci dell’aldilà*, 16.

ble against the room's wall. Bacci was in front of the radio, with his back to the audience and operating the radio's knobs, his head down in concentrated listening. Waves of radio noise alternated with eerie calm and warm voices: they gave spiritual teachings and talked about morality and the blessing of the afterlife. Music, chants, and choirs often emerged too, and were usually welcomed by the attendants, inspired by such heavenly music; it was considered a demonstration of the beauty and serenity of the Beyond. Then, at specific timings of the session, the voices of the attendees' dead loved ones followed one after the other, calling personal names and reassuring the audience about the survival of the soul.

Bacci's sessions were collective mourning performances, where private emotions and personal communications between the living and the dead became public and social, when the radio's loudspeaker irradiated the spectral messages in the room. Everybody was "touched" by a "coming and a passing, an extending and a penetrating"⁵⁸ of sound from the radio. The sound diffused from the radio created a connection between the sitters, one that was affective—with soundwaves physically touching and interacting with every-thing and every-body inhabiting the space—and emotional at the same time, with every sitter participating in each other's mourning, and in the enchantment of the possibility of the persistence of the voice across the insurmountable boundary of physical death. The EVP apparatus that Bacci set in motion can be considered what McCormack calls a device "for doing atmospheric things": "a device, by virtue of the cloud of constitutive affective relations in which it is immersed, which participates in the generation of an atmospheric sensing of something happening that can be felt."⁵⁹

The novelty of Bacci's EVPs is thus not only found in the unprecedented clarity of the voices he could channel, but also in the crucial spatial dimension that his experimental apparatus produced:

Registering the ghostly displaces and dislocates material geographies. [. . .] [N]o longer offering their normal course of practicable action, dislocated ghostly materialities disrupt our senses of space. In other words, the familiar object-spaces that endure through habitual practice are made strange and mysterious.⁶⁰

It could be said that Bacci's sessions created a ritual territory where the eerie "questions of agency"⁶¹ could be experienced almost as a temporary hierophany, which, while the radio played, re-centered the cartography of the everyday world, connecting the attendees' bodies and minds in resonance with otherworldly sonic, vocal, and musical intensities. What can therefore be traced is an influence and at the same time an evolution from Jürgenson's fascination with the radio's sonic world, here becoming the medium for a collective experience of enchantment.

Ce.M.M.—Virginia Ursi and Gabriella Alvisi

While representing a more traditional approach to EVP practice, the experiments of Virginia Ursi are an interesting example of the aesthet-

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Nancy, *Listening*, 17.

59

Derek McCormack, "Devices for Doing Atmospheric Things," in *Non-representational Methodologies*, ed. Philip Vannini (London: Routledge, 2015), 91.

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Julian Holloway and James Kneale, "Locating Haunting: A Ghost-Hunter's Guide," *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 3 (2008): 304.

61

Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, 11.

ical influence of Jürgenson as well as of the musicological approach of the aforementioned Father Ernetti. Together with Gabriella Alvisi, Ursi was one of the most active protagonists of the Italian EVP scene throughout the 1980s. In 1979 the two founded the Ce.M.M.—Centro Milanese Metafonia, the Milan Metaphonic Centre—which organized events and conferences in the fields of EVP and the paranormal. Both were in personal contact with Jürgenson—who participated in some of their events as well—and it is interesting how Raudive also re-emerged as a sort of spiritual mentor, recurrently intervening as a disembodied voice in the EVP sessions themselves: “[. . .] I ask if it is not possible to establish contact with Konstantin Raudive, an entity with whom I often establish a connection with, on the medium waves.”⁶²

From a technical perspective, Alvisi’s and Ursi’s practices reproduce the Swedish methods of silent microphone recordings, the tuning of the radio in-between frequencies, and manipulation of the magnetic tape, such as playing it at different speeds or reversing it. The process is fundamentally an asynchronous one, described as difficult and repetitive: a “long exercise of listening aimed at learning how to recognise the ‘invisible friends’ ”⁶³ by separating “the simple hisses and noises, avoiding charging them with meaning in order not to fall into acoustic hallucinations.”⁶⁴ However, similarly to Raudive’s approach, noise was not only a disturbance to be filtered out to interpret the otherworldly message, but also the very condition for the possibility of communication, conceived as the raw material used by spirits to modulate their disembodied voices into the physical domain. The spirits are considered “dynamic modulators who act upon the sounds, altering the acoustic frequencies.”⁶⁵ For this reason, the fidelity of the technological apparatus itself needed to be as poor and noisy as possible. Alvisi tended to prefer older, less advanced equipment:

In several [tape recorders] the Dolby method to silence the magnetic tape has recently been introduced. This is not particularly useful with regards to the reception of the “voices from the beyond,” as I have ascertained that they often use—although not always—carrier waves, sounds and noises.⁶⁶

Voice is only a portion of the spectrum of sonic phenomena that constitute the EVP experience in Ursi and Alvisi. As in the case of Jürgenson, in the writings of the two Italians the otherworldly sonic events in fact precede and prepare the paranormal phenomenon:

Sometimes on some sections of the reversed tape, the words previously recorded follow one another chaotically, like sounds from other planets, and the paranormal phenomenon seems to manifest itself.⁶⁷

To further demonstrate the aesthetical sonic dimension of these experiences, the paranormal voice often assumes, in Ursi’s accounts, the form of chants and choral music. For this reason, the EVP recordings are not only analyzed by the experimenter to extract the meaning of the words (in the form of lyrics), but also studied through their compositive and musicological character: some inexplicable elements of their

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Gabriella Alvisi, *Dimensione radiosa: Comunicazioni con i viventi di ieri* (Milano: SugarCo edizioni, 1983), 32. Translation by the author.

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Alvisi, *Dimensione Radiosa*, 232.

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Alvisi, 236.

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Alvisi, 173.

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Alvisi, 234.

67

Ursi, *Tra noi e loro l'arcobaleno*, 17.

style or the articulation of the singing technique are considered proof of their supernatural origin. In this context, Father Ernetti personally intervened in the analysis of the recording, connecting his expertise in the field of ancient sacred vocal music to the paranormal phenomena captured on tape by Ursi. Ernetti electroacoustically analyzed the tapes provided by Ursi—filtering the recordings to separate the different voices and identifying harmonical centers—allegedly identifying surprising and unexpected musicological details. He then transcribed the songs in musical notation, and even recorded them with the aid of singers “internationally famous as expert in Sumerian, Greek and Roman music”.⁶⁸

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Ursi, *Tra noi e loro l'arcobaleno*, 21.

69
Ursi, 21.

Father Pellegrino Ernetti began a thorough analysis, based on repeatedly listening to the songs, focused on the rhythm and articulation of the text [. . .]. Father Ernetti also took on the task of personally putting to music once again all the songs I had brought to him with the help of the two sopranos.⁶⁹

This musical dimension of the EVP can be seen as a form of evolution from Jürgenson's original aesthetic and creative connotations. It is a recurrent phenomenon in the case of Ursi and other Italian practitioners, sometimes paired with a collective, performative dimension of the experimental session, such as in the case of Bacci. Moreover, the electroacoustic elaborations operated by Ernetti on Ursi's recordings highlight the sonic focus of the case under examination, in which the voice is approached beyond its sole verbal meaning. The purely sonorous dimension of the EVP—an attempt at delving deeper into the inherent musical features in textures of noise, in radio interferences, and in fragmented, distorted choral music—has interest in and of itself. The musical connotation of the EVP practice I have outlined here is an invitation to move towards the next section of the paper, which traces the methodological, performative, and discursive resonances between the practice of EVP, an extended view of radiophony and forms of sonic art. In the section, occultural and artistic practices will be put in resonance with each other, not so much to identify a causal hierarchy between them, but to highlight how, in the case of EVP practices on one hand, and certain forms of experimental sound art on the other, two apparently distant and unrelated practices end up converging on similar use of technologies and similar dispositions towards the sonic effects of such uses.

From EVP Practice to Experimental Music

All the cases examined above portray, in their own ways, forms of subversive remediation of everyday audio technologies, which are performatively reformulated as dark media.⁷⁰ Nina Kokkinen considers that a relationship between the occultural and the artistic “should not be conceptualized as exotic, deviant or countercultural,” and that instead should be conceptualized—following Partridge—“rather a matter of ordinary, popular [. . .] practice.”⁷¹ In EVP practices, common tools such as the tape recorder, the microphone, and the radio are fundamentally misused, hacked, and even broken, producing behaviors that are

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Thacker, “Dark Media.”

71
Nina Kokkinen, “Occulture as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Art,” *Aries* 13, no. 1 (2013): 27.

interpreted as the key to extending their reception capabilities beyond the rationally possible. These apocryphal uses of audio technologies were conceptualized within a popular discourse on occulture during the 1960s and the early 1970s, which conceived of all paranormal phenomena as ontologically of a resonant, vibratory, or electromagnetic nature, as popularized by paranormal researchers such as John Keel⁷² or T. C. Lethbridge,⁷³ among others. In this context, the paranormal phenomenon emerges from material-discursive interactions mediated by sound, fundamentally because of a common origin of both electromagnetic and supernatural phenomena. It is within this conceptualization that an interesting transfer between EVP practices and the sonic arts emerges.

As highlighted above, the performative actions that constitute the EVP practice—such as tuning the receiver in between frequencies, amplifying the background noise of a silent ambience recording, reversing the tape, playing it back at a different speed—are productive of sonic phenomena which, within the temporary eerie territory of the EVP session, are interpreted as modulations and movements from otherworldly agencies. If abstracted from their occultural and spiritualist meaning, however, these technological interventions appear as practices to maximize the unpredictability of the medium's behavior, opening the way to different and surprising sonic interactions and phenomena whose occurrence, as Alvisi declares, "is always irresistibly charming."⁷⁴ Seen from the point of view of their creative and aesthetical potential, it comes as no surprise that very similar practices of sound production and media manipulation exist in the apparently distant field of experimental sonic arts. From the first experiments of *musique concrète* by Pierre Schaeffer in the late 1940s, to the electroacoustic compositions of radiophonic studios,⁷⁵ up to recent forms of radical improvisation and noise performances, musical experimentation has often operated similar forms of subversion of everyday audio media. It is common to find practices of transforming tape recorders or commercial radio receivers into means of sound production of expressive possibilities beyond the traditional musical instruments.

The radio is in this sense particularly relevant. From its early days, the radiophonic medium has always oscillated between the role of receiver and that of revealer, between a tool to receive information and a source of creativity and imagination. The futurist manifesto of the Radia (the radiophonic art) is exemplary in this sense, in which the authors, Filippo T. Marinetti and Pino Masnata, imagine a "reception, amplification and transformation of vibrations emitted by matter. Just as today we listen to the song of the woods and of the sea tomorrow we will be seduced by the vibrations of a diamond or of a flower."⁷⁶ They can even predate the occultural uses of the device, speculating on the "reception amplification and transformation of vibrations emitted by living beings by living or dead spirits, noisy dramas of states of mind without words."⁷⁷ Such futurist dreams, although rarely explored in practice, would indeed become reality through the pioneering works for radio receivers by John Cage—*Imaginary Landscape n. 4 (March No. 2)*, a piece for 24 performers on 12 radios—or Berio's radio electronic works such as *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)* (1954) or *Visage* (1960), where the radio medium unveils the sonic dramaturgy inherent in the

72

John Keel, *The Eighth Tower: The Cosmic Force Behind All Religious, Occult and UFO Phenomena* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1976).

73

Thomas Charles Lethbridge, *Ghost and Ghoul* (London: Routledge, 1961).

74

Ursi, *Tra noi e loro l'arcobaleno*, 234.

75

With Karlheinz Stockhausen at the WDR Studio, Luciano Berio at Milan's Studio di Fonologia or at the BBC Radiophonic Studio with Delia Derbyshire, to name a few.

76

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Pino Masnata, "La Radia," in *Manifesti futuristi*, ed. Guido Bonino (Milano: Bur, 2013), 214, translation by the author.

77

Marinetti and Masnata, "La Radia," 214.

vocal utterance. More recently, creative uses of radio are found in the genres of ambient and noise music, with William Basinski's *Shortwave Music* being a relevant example: an album that investigates the musical sonic world accessible through the exploration of shortwave frequency transmissions.

The aforementioned examples highlight connections between EVP and experimental music practices beyond the mere technical similarity, tracing an analogous disposition towards creative and productive acts of listening. This listening deterritorializes from ordinary forms of sonic or musical communication, tuned instead to capture transitory, unexpected, and peripheral sonorous events as ways to create new meanings and new affects precisely for their otherworldliness. While the EVP practitioners' writings examined so far do not mention any influence from the electroacoustic music of the time, the correspondence between the artistic and the paranormal fields finds instead fruitful evidence when investigated from the opposite direction. Another relevant occultural transfer can be found transiting from the EVP to the sonic arts. This movement is demonstrated by the interest that EVP recordings fostered among communities of experimental music enthusiasts, manifested by the numerous publications of EVP-themed compilations recently published.⁷⁸

Furthermore, it is possible to find composers and musicians who identify Jürgenson and Raudive as major inspirators for their musical experimentations. In such cases, the influence is not only aesthetical, but also methodological, as these composers remediate and reproduce the original EVP techniques as forms of musical production. Once again, one of the major protagonists of this trend comes from Sweden. The influential artist, musician, and curator Carl Michael Von Hausswolff made the exploration of peripheral and unorthodox uses of audio technologies and low-fidelity equipment one of his principal artistic endeavors. Von Hausswolff has a deep and long-lasting connection with the EVP environment. He can be considered the rediscoverer of the work of Jürgenson: he curated the first English edition of Jürgenson's book⁷⁹ and is also responsible for the creation of the "Audioscopic Research Archive" at the ZKM Institute in Karlsruhe (Germany), which makes accessible the archive of Jürgenson's tapes, devices, and writings that Von Hausswolff himself obtained from the late practitioner's widow.

Von Hausswolff's interest in Jürgenson informs his artistic practice as well, as he often remediates the researcher's techniques of EVP communication as methods for sound production and composition. Especially in works such as *Operations of Spirit Communication* (Die Stadt, 2000) and his releases in collaboration with EVP practitioner Michael Esposito—*The Ghost of Effingham* (Ash International, 2010), *A Ghost Aghast* (Spectral Electric, 2007), *The Old Vicarage* (Firework Editions Records, 2009)—Hausswolff remediates Jürgenson's and Raudive's EVP techniques as modes of sonic processing and interaction. The artist's interest lies in the possibility to musically explore and extend Jürgenson's *sonic* findings, abstracting the EVP technologies from the spiritual and paranormal domain, towards a practice aimed "not [to] show up on the possibilities that there are other things around us [. . .] for me it has mostly been a tool [. . .] for making art."⁸⁰ As he continues,

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Such as *Spectra Ex-Machina* (Brussels: Sub Rosa, 2019), *The Ghost Orchid: An Introduction to EVP* (London: Ash International, 1999), as well as the monographic *From The Studio of Audioscopic Research* (London: Ash International, 2000) dedicated to Jürgenson's recordings or *The Voices of The Dead: Archives From Konstantin Raudive and Gerhard Stempnik* (Brussels: Sub Rosa, 2020), gathering together Raudive's recordings as well as remixes by multiple electronic music producers.

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Jürgenson, *Voice Transmissions with the Deceased*.

80

"Carl Michael von Hausswolff & Michael Esposito about EVP," interview by Mike Harding, *Long Wave*, ResonanceFM, December 3, 2013. Audio, <https://cmvonhausswolff.net/2013/12/01/long-wave-resonance104-4fm-3rd-december-2013/>.

I'm the artist [who is] taking these things from my point of view [. . .] and these works are not intended to be any kind of works that actually show EVP [. . .]. It is just compositional tools, using the for instance the spiricom technique or diode technique or any kind of technique that EVP researchers use.⁸¹

81

Von Hausswolff, "Carl Michael von Hausswolff & Michael Esposito about EVP."

82

Von Hausswolff, "Carl Michael von Hausswolff & Michael Esposito about EVP."

83

Barad, "Agential Realism: Feminist Interventions in Understanding Scientific Practices."

84

Aldo Ammirata, "Empirical Evidence - Ether Voyage + (evp transmission)," accessed May 15, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/EmpiricalEvidence-EtherVoyageevpTransmission>.

The practice of EVP recording is occulturally remediated as a creative means of sound production, artistically reconnecting to Jürgenson's original fascination for the sonic manifestation of EVP. In this context, any metaphysical dimension of such practices is apparently lost or, at least, reconstructed from a performative and imaginative point of view:

We did a series [. . .] of these types of recordings in a church, [. . .] then [. . .] we took the recordings, that quite ambient recordings in the building itself, the atmosphere, and went through them [. . .] looking for speech anomalies or spectral anomalies of voices that weren't there.⁸²

This description might appear paradoxical, in relation to Von Hausswolff's stated artistic intent: why search for "spectral anomalies" in a church, when the use of EVP technical apparatus is purely exploited for its sonic processes? From an agential realist point of view,⁸³ every act of experimentation is never merely a descriptive act but rather a productive one, in which phenomena emerge from material-discursive practices. What composes the experimental apparatus of EVP that Von Hausswolff borrows from Jürgenson, therefore, is not just the noisy tape recorder, or the untuned radio. The apparatus is instead a network of agencies distributed between technologies, performances, spaces, expectations, and even intentions. In this sense, the technology is a medium through which the artist creates the conditions for the potential imprinting of voices and signals on the magnetic tape, resulting in a material-discursive attunement necessary for any process involving EVP techniques. In other words, to correctly apply the technique, the practitioner must search for spectral voices independently of whether their intent is artistic or occultural.

Similar occultural approaches to EVP practice are found, once again, in Italy, where various sound artists and composers reuse and rethink EVP techniques to produce experimental artworks, audiovisual installations, and music publications. The influence of Von Hausswolff's approach to EVP, as well as the knowledge of the occultural background of such practices, is made evident for instance in the liner notes of the programmatically entitled *Ether Voyage EVP Transmission*, a music publication by Sicilian musician Aldo Ammirata, who explores these themes and methods in his music published under the name Empirical Evidence:

The concert-performance wants to be a research and a highlighting of the metaphysical sound, of the microsounds and its effects on the human perception and inspired to the work of Leif Elggren (Elgaland Vargaland), C. M. Von Hausswolff, Nikola Tesla and Konstantin Raudive.⁸⁴

Here Ammirata aims at defining a lineage that moves from Raudive and Tesla⁸⁵ to Von Hausswolff and his collaborator Leif Elggren, demonstrating another occultural transfer from Sweden to Italy. This occultural-artistic movement is further manifested in the work of Pietro Riparbelli, an active sound artist and composer who often utilizes EVP techniques for his musical releases under the name K11, published by the independent label Radical Matters. Interestingly, Riparbelli mentions Marcello Bacci as one major influence for his work, as well as the reading of François Brume, a theologian who wrote extensively about Ernetti and his chronovisor:

My interests for machine-based transcommunication and for EVP [. . .] comes from meeting Marcello Bacci, director of the psycophonic group in Grosseto and subsequently from reading several essays on the topic by the theologian François Brume.⁸⁶

Similarly to Von Hausswolff's approach, Riparbelli stresses the purely artistic intentions behind the use of EVP practices, while remediating the paranormal meaning behind them from imaginative and speculative points of view:

What I find fascinating is the possibility of the existence of other dimensions that can overlap radio waves and the so called phenomena of "residual waves," often beyond the reach of our senses and of our technological means. [. . .] I am keen to stress, though, that my interest for this phenomena is exclusively poetic, with no desire to communicate with other worlds nor of being a medium.⁸⁷

Another central element in Riparbelli's art is the importance of space, the ecological dimension of sound phenomena, and how acoustics can mediate embodied dimensions of space and its spiritual, metaphysical, or imaginal connotations. This is particularly evident in the ongoing project Cathedrals, which is described as "a sort of sound archive collecting material from cathedrals, churches, and other sacred places."⁸⁸ The importance of sonic ecologies intersects with the EVP research as well, with the creation of installations in which Riparbelli physically intervenes in spaces with lo-fi technologies aimed at capturing subtle and peripheral modulations of sound. This is the case of *He Tries to Come To Us*, an audiovisual piece produced in collaboration with INFLUX and presented at the 2010's "Visions From the Future .:Iridescent Worlds:." Festival in Turin. The piece is subtitled as "Instrumental Transcommunication Action with Short Radio Receivers and Radio Video Camera Inside the Former Psychiatric Hospital in Volterra,"⁸⁹ and, in the words of the author,

The project's aim is to perform an instrumental transcommunication action working on rough footage taken during the actual performance and associate it with the audio/video footage taken during a December 2007 performance at the former Volterra psychiatric hospital. The performance was achieved using a

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Seminal Serbian physicist often associated with a paranormal approach to electricity and radio transmission.

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"Pietro Riparbelli," interview by Gianmarco Del Re, accessed May 13, 2024, <https://www.fluid-radio.co.uk/2012/07/postcards-from-italy-livorno-pietro-riparbelli/>.

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"Pietro Riparbelli."

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"Cathedrals: Pietro Riparbelli Audio Archive Project," Sonic Field, accessed on May 15, 2024, <https://sonicfield.org/cathedrals-pietro-riparbelli-audio-archive-project/>.

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Pietro Riparbelli, "K11/INFLUX_HE TRIES TO COME TO US," Pietro Riparbelli, 2010, YouTube video footnote, <https://youtu.be/n6JrvkjETU?si=0ph0J1lxWRISyIQz>.

shortwave radio receiver and video receiver recording images and signals from a dipole antenna installed in the building. [. . .] Every light interference of the camera will be perceived both in the projection and in the live sound.⁹⁰

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Riparbelli, "K11/INFLUX_HE TRIES TO COME TO US."

This project is clearly in resonance with Von Hausswolff's work: in both cases, a historically, culturally, or spiritually-charged space is chosen as an apt place to apply the purely musical interpretation of the EVP practice. As mentioned earlier, this shows the need for maintaining a connection with the metaphysical aspect of the practice itself, as the experimental apparatus of EVP cannot be separated from its original paranormal context.

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L'Impero della Luce, "Bunker 5 Brigata Lucca," program notes of Audiomanzia, Sonic Arts Festival (Padova, 2023).

This is also the case of the acousmatic piece *Bunker 5 Brigata Lucca* by L'Impero della Luce, an Italian electroacoustic experimental duo formed by Johann Merrich and eeviac. In this work composed for the Audiomanzia Festival of Centro d'Arte dell'Università di Padova, curated by the author and premiered at Circolo Nadir in Padova in 2023, the artistic intention merges with the awareness of the historical trauma connected to a World War I zone:

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L'Impero della Luce, "Bunker 5 Brigata Lucca."

We went to a place where thousands of bloody deaths took place: we went to the banks of the Piave river, where the terrible battle of the Solstice was fought in June 1918. We entered bunker 5 of the Lucca Brigade and we recorded our stay in space.⁹¹

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L'Impero della Luce, "Bunker 5 Brigata Lucca."

The duo used electromagnetic sensors and other devices for "sonic-paranormal research"⁹² to capture the vibratory and energetic oscillations in (and of) the place, recording them and then presenting them in an almost documentary fashion:

Sudden changes in volume and the appearance of a rhythmic pulsation can be heard: at this moment we are in the main room of the bunker, near the loophole used by the Italians to shoot at the Austrian soldiers on the banks of the river.⁹³

Similarly to Von Hausswolff and Riparbelli, a purely artistic object is produced by applying occultural practices to the exploration of an emotionally and historically charged place. It therefore seems that a novel, unexpected element emerges from the musical practices outlined so far. The composers declare that their use of EVP techniques is fundamentally artistic, incorporating them in their own practices for creative purposes, distinct from belief and spiritual frameworks, as well as from paranormal research intentions. However, they bring the EVP apparatus *in situ*, making the paranormal technique interact with specifically chosen spaces, often places of worship, or of collective grief and trauma. They choose a space, in other words, not so much for its acoustic quality, but for its hauntings: spaces haunted by their historical and cultural meaning, spaces where ghosts would be found. This connection between sound art and EVP practices, however, appears less and less contradictory. As demonstrated by Jürgenson and the influence he had on paranormal researchers and artists alike, the practice of EVP can have an inherent musical dimension. If this

could be accepted, then the reverse could be true as well: there could be an intrinsic spectral connotation of certain forms of sound art that establishes an ecological relationship to space and place. Indeed, these musical forms could tap into peripheral, hauntological dimension of acoustics, rendered manifest by specific material-discursive sonic apparatuses.

As acoustics—the ways sound waves travel and behave in space—is a direct consequence of the size, shape, structure, and materials composing a specific architecture, it is possible to consider room resonances, echoes, and reverbs as a physical reminder of the history of that place, its original functions, its use, and the story of what happened to make the place sound the way it sounds. This is a hauntology as the agency of what is no longer, which still affects the present day:⁹⁴ the sonic atmosphere of an abandoned asylum speaks of its residents, and the way the reverb of an empty war bunker affects sound events in the present, speaking of the soldiers who hid in it. The connection between acoustics and affective atmospheres is well documented: reverb can bring an “often involuntary revival of memory caused by listening and the evocative power of sounds,”⁹⁵ and emotions of “a personal or collective nature.”⁹⁶ Vast echoes and architectural resonances can trigger the experience of the numinous atmosphere⁹⁷ and can pave the way for a “metaphysical dimension of sound.”⁹⁸ This can work as well for any sonic or vibratory phenomenon technologically captured in the place—such as electromagnetic or radio modulations—as they all contribute to embodied, affective ecologies that escape from the rational logics of the visual, but immerse and transform. The musical use of EVP devices thus performatively re-instantiates the agencies of past communications, transmissions, and relationships, becoming a way to interact with the hauntological intensities inhabiting the place, from a non-visual, but relational and embodied point of perception, stimulating different, subtler emotions, imaginations, narratives.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was twofold. First, it introduced new research on an under-investigated aspect of paranormal studies, that of the rich and diverse tradition of EVP practices, which arose in Italy in the early 1970s. To do so, it traced the transfers between the Swedish origins of the practice and some relevant Italian cases, focusing on the sonic, experiential, and embodied dimension of such apocryphal modes of mediation. The connection between the two countries’ EVP scenes shows a constitutive importance of Jürgenson’s personal travels and interactions, delineating a heritage that constitutes a different trajectory from that of Raudive in the English-speaking world. Second, this paper highlighted an occultural resonance between the EVP practices within paranormal circles and their remediations in artistic contexts, such as experimental music and sound art. In this case as well, an interesting connection between Sweden—with the figure of Carl Michael Von Hausswolff in particular—and a scene of Italian sound artists emerged, unveiling that what seemed to be a mere artistic reduction of spiritual practices involves instead complex embodied performances of the histories and sociocultural hauntings of places.

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Mark Fisher, “What Is Hauntology?,” *Film Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2012): 16–24.

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Jean-François Augoyard and Henri Torgue, *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2006), 21.

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Augoyard and Torgue, *Sonic Experience*, 23.

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Tonino Griffiero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2016), 73.

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Augoyard and Torgue, *Sonic Experience*, 130.

However, the research conducted until now is only the beginning of a broader and more structured approach to the field that needs further analysis, from multiple points of enquiry. First, a more systematic study of the Italian practitioners, as well as their connections with other occultural contexts, should be carried out. This would allow obtaining a more comprehensive map of the influences, similarities, and specificities of the field. Moreover, the sound-based approach introduced in this paper would benefit from a deeper analysis of the technologies involved, as well as of the existing recordings, often released as audio cassette or vinyl as part of book publications. Furthermore, the (oc)cultural feedback loop between EVP practice and experimental music outlined at the end of this paper could be further explored by highlighting the role of Father Ernetti as well as the possible connections with the Italian tradition of electroacoustic music. The breadth of these possible future trajectories demonstrates the richness of the field, and the scope of its interest for academia. Further investigations could greatly expand the aesthetical and inherently creative dynamics of a peripheral, but long-lasting and fascinating way of thinking about our relationship with the invisible, with technology, and with the enchanting nature of mediation itself.