

Phonographic Encounters

Mapping Transnational Cultures of Sound, 1890–1945

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Chapter 8

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8 ‘Phonographic awareness’

Recorded sound in early twentieth-century Italy between aesthetic questions and economic struggles

Benedetta Zucconi

In the first half of the 1930s, several Italian periodicals began referring to a given ‘phonographic awareness’ (*coscienza fonografica*). Today’s reader would find it rather difficult to understand, based on these accounts, what exactly such sentiment was supposed to be. Nonetheless, whatever such phonographic awareness was, authors seemed to unanimously agree that it was missing in Italy at that time: ‘within the Italian public, what we already called “phonographic awareness” is far to be spread enough’¹ complained columnist Alberto Rossi in the magazine *Il dramma* (*The drama*) in 1934 (Rossi 1934, p. 43). That same year, *Il disco* (*The disc*)² titled an opening article with this same utterance: here the lack of a phonographic culture was related to the lack of musical culture in general all over the peninsula, in comparison with countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States (*Il disco* 1934, pp. 1–2). Both periodicals had good reasons to criticise the situation with music in Italy at that time, especially with reference to recorded sound, which had neither reached the status of a cultural object nor had encouraged any new cultural or artistic expression; however, as a matter of fact, it was in the 1930s that recorded sound arose as a topic of discussion in several printed media, which even happened to independently share the same jargon, as shown in the aforementioned example. At that time, and due to different factors,³ phonography experienced a growth of interest among cultural circles, which also led to a negotiation of its epistemology and ultimately of its ontology.

The very fact that recorded sound began to be a recurrent topic in Italian printed media brought about the necessity of defining specific taxonomies and categories; in other words, of creating a common ground that enabled to communicate about this topic. ‘New media are media we do not yet know how to talk about’, suggests media historian Benjamin Peters (2009, p. 18), thus highlighting the connection between inventions and their epistemological definition within contemporary discourses. Such processes of verbal definition can be considered to be part of the creation itself. In fact, inventions are not punctual events, but rather complex phenomena which

also involve rules, institutions, social practices, texts and, more in general, discourses. As Tom Gunning claims:

history deals not only with events but, primarily, and some would claim exclusively, with the discourses they generate and which record them. The introduction of new technology in the modern era employs a number of rhetorical tropes and discursive practices that constitute our richest source for excavating what the newness of technology entailed.

(Gunning 2003, p. 39)

Rhetorical tropes and discursive practices are not just tools to describe media *a posteriori*. As Marcia Siefert claimed, ‘narratives also define inventions’ (Siefert 1995, p. 419), meaning that descriptions of media, of their users and uses always refer to specific contexts, values and ideas, and ultimately can become normative. Such accounts, according to Siefert, can define both social practices related to media and ‘new uses and directions for developments’ (p. 420). On the one hand, then, technological inventions always trigger the production of written texts of different nature (articles, manuals, illustrations and advertisements); on the other hand, all these written sources foster the establishment of new rules and jargons connected with these new technologies; in other words, they contribute to its social and cultural construction. According to Lisa Gitelman, ‘technology, whether inscriptive or not, involves a lot of paper. Machines get some of their meaning from what is written about them in different ways and at specific junctures, in research plans, patent applications, promotional puff, and so on’ (Gitelman 1999, p. 6).

Discourses surrounding recorded sound started flourishing worldwide shortly after the invention of the phonograph, and the definition of cultural practices related to the new medium was thus part of this process. All around the Western world several texts about phonography were published, periodical publications in particular, aimed at describing and discussing the technological novelty of recorded sound.⁴ As described above in more general terms, the terminological and epistemological empty space opened by recorded sound allowed writers, intellectuals and users to play not just a descriptive but also a prescriptive role in defining the ontological nature of musical reproduction.

In this chapter, I will discuss the emergence of a discourse about phonography in Italy in the interwar period. I will focus on the first half of the 1930s, when two different contexts, namely the environment of music composers and the copyright-related juridical arena, happened to deal with similar issues; both, in fact, tackled very similar questions connected to recorded sound, which nonetheless led to deeply different answers. The questions they asked aimed at defining the exact nature of recorded sound, but were triggered by completely different needs and aims and ‘formed a matrix of

heterogeneous, changing, and even contradictory messages' (Gitelman, 2003, p. 66). Ultimately, they all contributed to define the 'phonographic awareness' mentioned above, namely a more mature and complex understanding of recorded sound. At first sight, there was no direct relationship between the two fields at that time, and even a certain imbalance can be noticed, since the legal sphere seems to be more informed about the discourses circulating at the time in the music environment than vice versa. However, they both operated in the same cultural and social context, albeit autonomously, and they discussed similar issues and used similar tools to circulate their ideas, mainly the press and especially magazines, a form of thought transmission typical of Italy in the post-war period (Hallamore Caesar et al. 2011).

But the purpose of this contribution is not so much to claim that, as already effectively demonstrated by Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker in a classic essay, 'different social groups have radically different interpretations of one technological artefact' (Pinch and Bijker 1987, p. 41), which involve 'the contents of the artefact itself' (p. 42). In a more culture-oriented, musicological rather than media-focused perspective, I intend to illustrate how a full definition and acceptance of recorded music came in interwar Italy from a rather unexpected milieu, namely the juridical community, which was for several reasons freer from aesthetic constraints and more inclined to deal pragmatically with questions arising from practical issues.⁵

Italy represents an interesting field of investigation in this respect, due to its cultural and social features at that time.⁶ On the one hand, recorded sound was far from having reached the status of cultural object in the peninsula, especially within environments connected with musical life; discourses, institutions and initiatives connected to phonography displayed a certain backwardness if compared to similar realities in Europa, where, for instance, sound archives had been established since decades⁷ and phonographic periodicals were regularly printed and distributed.⁸ On the other hand, and surprisingly enough, interwar Italy reveals a particularly lively picture with regard to the evolution of copyright law and, in particular, the legal protection of the record industry's products. Such a discrepancy in dealing with similar issues from different environments makes the Italian case emblematic and an ideal case study in order to investigate the epistemological construction of sound recording.

Sound recording in theory: musicians and intellectuals in interwar Italy

The low consideration in which recorded sound was held in Italy could be attributed to several factors. Whether the absence of specific publications and of a national sound archive were to be considered both as a cause and as a consequence of the Italian lack of interest towards phonography, a system of music production still linked to nineteenth-century dynamics, relying on theatres, impresarios and music publishers, and the modest size of

the Italian music market were determinant obstacles to the emergence of a sound recording culture. In fact, and despite the central role played by Italian opera and Italian performers in the early decades of the recording industry, cylinders and discs circulating in Italy were mostly produced by foreign big majors. The initial enthusiasm shown by the population for the phonograph, witnessed by over 200 ‘demonstrations’ throughout Italy already in 1878–1879 (Vita 2019), did not turn into a solid cultural interest, due to a country still very disunited and almost completely lacking an industrial background capable of supporting a significant record production. The two main centres where record production developed were Naples and Milan. However, Naples concentrated almost exclusively on local music repertoire, with no market outside the city,⁹ while Milan became mainly home to foreign companies, which often absorbed the sporadic entrepreneurial attempts to establish a local disc production. This may have contributed to the general perception of phonography as something foreign, considered more as a threat than an economic opportunity.¹⁰

But even more relevant for the failed development of a phonographic discourse was the cultural hegemony played by Italian neo-idealistic philosophy in the first decades of the twentieth century, and whose leading figure was the philosopher, historian and intellectual Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). Neo-idealism, which had developed and spread from the 1910s onwards, succeeded in permeating every cultural branch and institution in Italy in the first half of the century. Philosopher Norberto Bobbio, in describing what he doesn’t hesitate to call ‘Croce’s dictatorship’, points out how ‘the intellectual movements of [Croce’s] time both irradiated from and converged in Croce’s thought’ (Bobbio 1969, p. 69). Neo-idealistic philosophy was based on the total supremacy of humanities over technology and scientific thought, producing therefore a strong shift from the previous positivistic culture, which was widespread in Italy until the turn of the century. According to Crocian idealism (so as ethnomusicologist Giovanni Giuriati) ‘historical and human “facts” [...] could only be considered in their uniqueness and non-repeatability, thereby denying value to the comparative and generalising procedure’ (Giuriati 1995, p. 106). Such a denial of repeatability did not only affect the scientific method and empirical research. Without a doubt, it also constituted an obstacle to the legitimisation of recorded sound – as mass-produced and repeatable object – as part of high culture. Furthermore, neo-idealism also tended to avoid and refuse any technical feature related to art, by virtue of the moment of intuition-creation, an inseparable and crucial combination of artistic expression. According to Benedetto Croce:

In the process of art production there is no practical or technical element: fantastic spontaneity rules unrivalled, from the beginning to the end of that process; the concept of technique is completely unrelated both to pure aesthetic and to real art criticism.

(Croce 1905, p. 62)

Such a radical position made it nearly inconceivable to even discuss the potential artistic value of the recording, tied as it was to technical and mechanical circumstances. Technology was, for neo-idealistic thinkers, nothing more than a necessary evil that could and had to be overcome by art as such. The less cumbersome technology was, the closer art would be to an ideal of perfection. Therefore, recorded music, although it represented a relevant phenomenon in the middlebrow musical life, struggled to access the arenas of intellectual exchange. In this framework, some of the words written on mechanical reproduction by Crocian intellectual Francesco Flora on the Crocian-oriented music journal *La Rassegna Musicale* (*The Musical Review*) are particularly telling:

That the machine creates new sounds, new sonic mixes, in this destruction of space which is the most violent task of modern temporal speed, nobody wants to deny it. I say sounds, because I intend to refer to those that do not remain desert noise; but I do not consider them to be in any way a new art form, falling into that easy and candid error for which a certain technical procedure aimed at producing certain acoustic effects, is considered for itself an artistic fact, forgetting that its qualities are purely mechanical.

(Flora 1930, p. 397)

Its qualities could not be artistic owing to the very fact that they were mechanical; this opinion was broadly shared in Italian intellectual circles, and addressed not only phonography, but also other mechanical arts such as cinema. Nevertheless, and similar to what happened for cinema (Pitassio 2014), the 1930s witnessed the first attempts to aesthetically acknowledge phonography within cultural discourses.¹¹ In order to do that, musicians and critics often embedded the discussion within the most prominent intellectual framework, namely the Crocian neo-idealism. As a matter of fact, these first considerations about phonography were deeply influenced by idealistic issues and aims. More than by purely aesthetic questions, discourses were often triggered by more concrete concerns, such as complaints about (quoting a very well-known line) ‘the menace of mechanical music’ (Sousa 1906). Hence composer Mario Castelnuovo Tedesco, in an attempt to defend recorded sound against the alarmist idea that new technologies were going to substitute musical instruments, argued that ‘the disc is a new form of edition: the “sonic edition”’ (Castelnuovo Tedesco 1931, p. 233). Indeed, such a claim did not originate from an aesthetic query; it was the reaction to a concrete concern, namely the alleged threat played by recorded sound towards live music professions (orchestras, music schools, instrument makers and music publishers), which drove to the urge of discussing the role of recorded sound within musical life. Nonetheless, with these words Castelnuovo Tedesco entered the ontological realm: he discussed the nature and essence of sound recording.

Such an attempt wasn't isolated. In fact, in interwar Italy, neo-idealistic instances were connected with other intellectual stimuli from beyond the Alps, such as the discourse – which had already arisen at the end of the nineteenth century – on phonography and authorship, that is, on sound recording as a witness to the author's will as opposed to the interpreter's (Katz 2001), and advocated, among others, also by Stravinsky. Here the typically Crocian idea of the artistic moment perfectly corresponding to the artist's creative process matched with a characteristic trait of the New Objectivity movement (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), namely the refusal of individualistic interpretation – typical of the Romantic aesthetic – in favour of an 'objective' display of the composers' ideas.¹² To assert the existence of a single 'correct' interpretation (the one authorised by the author), or to say that recordings should be a model to be followed, namely 'imitated' by interpreters, meant then to question interpreters' roles. According to intellectual Alfredo Parente:

In a century's time [...] the subjective claims of performers, with their variety of performances and connected contrasts and disagreements, will no longer take place. The Beethovens and Mozarts of the twentieth century, if there ever are or ever will be, will be able to entrust their music, performed or made to perform according to their desire, to the talking machine; and when they are no longer themselves or others who enforce their will, the impressed records will bear witness and the varieties of interpretation will have a point of agreement. [...] If the gramophone allows to listen to music in the most faithful way, as its creator intended it, then it will be easy to admit that the ideal of the interpreter (concerning music not yet recorded on disc), is to get as close as possible to a machine, without adding or leaving anything to the most realistic historical reality of sounds.

(Parente 1934, pp. 248–9)

Similarly, during the First International Music Congress held in 1933 in Florence, composer and ethnologist Luigi Colacicchi emphasised the importance of recorded sound in erasing the interpreter's role: 'Music, which is inferior to other arts because of this necessary intervention by the interpreter, who translates signs into sound, has become completely independent and abstract thanks to the disc' (Colacicchi 1933, p. 78).

From these few accounts, it is clear how the disc rose to the role of keeper of composers' intentions as the authority for an 'objective' performance. As a matter of fact, these first discussions about recorded music eventually elevate it to a higher consideration as a cultural object, dismissing the rather well-spread prejudice of recorded sound as a mere toy or pub entertainment. The legitimation of recorded sound happened through the definition of its nature and function, namely through an epistemological process which brought to a first sketch of its ontological features. It is nevertheless evident how these discourses constrained phonography within already defined

categories of thought; the focus is often a different one (the question of interpretation, the role of the author, the situation of musical life), and phonography is taken into consideration only as functional to aims and goals of a specific subject. It should not be forgotten that the authors of these texts as well as the journals where the texts were published had a strongly neo-idealistic imprinting. As a consequence, no consideration was devoted by any of these writers to the (still) cumbersome technical side of recordings. Sound devices and recording processes seemed to be considered here as neutral elements, empty containers of information. Ultimately, this neo-idealistic legitimation implied the refusal of phonography's medial nature as well as of its materiality.

Sound recording in practice: copyright law and industry

But Croce-inspired musicians and intellectuals were not alone in discussing the nature and features of recorded sound in Italy at that time. As a matter of fact, a parallel discourse about phonography can be found in a different cultural arena, far from the official outputs of Italian artistic and musical culture, namely in the discussions about copyright and royalties which stemmed in the same years among jurists and music industry lobbyists.

The urge to define some aspects related to recorded sound originated from the hard times suffered by the phonographic industry in the interwar period, partly due to the 1929 global economic crisis. In addition, the emergence of radio into the mediascape made it necessary to define boundaries and spheres of influence between broadcasting companies and the phonographic industry. In this particular framework, discs' trade contraction occurring in the 1930s persuaded industrials that profits should shift – as Simon Frith pointed out – from record sales to performing rights and royalties (Frith 1988, p. 17). The crisis of the phonographic industry was not confined within Italian borders, but rather experienced by many European countries, and concerns about the radio were common among disc producers and performers all around the world. Quite surprisingly, Italy played a pioneering role in pushing for a new legal safeguard of the phonographic industry in Italy and within the international discussions.

In those years, reflections and debates about copyright spread and evolved in Europe and in many countries around the world. In 1886, the Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works took place in Bern, Switzerland. On that occasion, several countries (initially including Germany, Belgium, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Haiti, Liberia, Switzerland, Tunisia and Italy) officially ratified an international settlement in order to protect artistic and intellectual products, and marking thus the official birth of copyright. The agreement signed in Bern (still effective nowadays) was followed by further revisions and lively discussions, joined by an increasing number of countries. On the one hand, it was necessary to define the principles of a newly born idea and, on the other hand, participants

needed to constantly update their decisions in accordance with new technological improvements, media and contexts, which were themselves undergoing rapid evolution and significant changes at that time. The main revisions took place in Berlin in 1908 and then in Rome in 1928. Issues concerning recorded sound were extensively discussed for the first time during the Berlin revision, whereas recorded sound found no space in the Bern outcomes (only nine years after Edison's invention).¹³ But it was during the meeting in Rome that new disputes about 'mechanical music' arose. In the last decades, recorded sound had become a relevant phenomenon within society, culture and economy, and required thus more serious consideration. Furthermore, attendees in Rome had to tackle the newly born phenomenon of broadcasting, which also needed to be defined in its juridical terms, and to be regulated with respect to the phonographic industry.

Consequently, on the occasion of the Rome revision Italy became the geographical epicentre of copyrights discussions. It is no coincidence that regarding copyright legislation, Fascism (which had ruled the country since 1922) intended to play a particularly prominent role in the international arena. The Rome revision, promoted by the regime as an Italian success, was therefore part of Fascism's hegemonic plan, which intended to showcase fascist economy as a successful alternative to liberalism and socialism (Fleischer 2015). The copyright law approved in 1925 was also presented under this light and, although it was in fact no more than a due act, regulating years of discussions and suits, it was appropriated by the regime to propagandise that idea of progress and modernity it wanted to represent abroad (Roghi 2007).¹⁴

However, it is also thanks to the impetus given by the fascist government that discussions about recorded sound and copyright flourished in Italy in the 1930s. Such discussions articulated, and can now be traced, within three main contexts: the outcomes of the Bern Convention and its further revisions, chronicles of the first congress of the phonographic industry (held in Rome in 1933) and juridical periodicals. In these sources, it is possible to follow the evolution of a phonographic discourse, starting from empirical observation of everyday life, but evolving into a more complex analysis of recorded sound nature. In legal discussions, it was largely a matter of specifying what exactly defined recorded sound and some of its features in particular.

An intensively debated issue during the Rome revision of the Bern convention in 1928 was the legal protection of performers: attendees discussed whether it was necessary, and how, to protect performers' rights. It was the Italian delegation that raised the question whether (and to what extent) performers should be considered as co-authors of the work performed, and what kind of contribution they brought as a participant to the creative process. Clearly, the issue was tightly connected with the growth of technical reproduction: discs and radio had brought music performances into every home, every public space, and as Monika Dommann observes, 'it was not

composers but performing artists that everyone could hear' (Dommann 2019, p. 107). As a consequence, performers started to stand up to claim their rights as contributors to the production and economic success of discs. As the Rome proceedings report, 'it is indeed indisputable that phonographic records in particular derive their commercial value in large part from the fame of the performer' (Union internationale pour la protection des œuvres littéraires et artistiques, 1929, p. 78). Performers' rights were then considered within the realm of gramophonic reproduction, and from this starting point several questions arose. Jurist Amedeo Giannini summarised them efficaciously some years after the conference in Rome:

Musicians, comic and tragic actors, and speakers used to conclude their activity by playing, acting, singing, and speaking, without the possibility of further exploitation of their performances. Today, by means of the disc, the most famous performer can be listened at will by disc and radio owners [...]. All these new means represent an additional exploitation of interpreters' activity. Do they have a right of ownership over their performances? If they do, can they be denied the benefit of it, as is done with authors? If they do not have a property right, can one deny that their activity is exploited? And does this exploitation not deserve protection? Does it deserve protection, in what way and by what means can it be protected?

(Giannini 1931, pp. 162–3)

Sound recording not only changed the artistic output into an object (*res*) which could be sold, enjoyed, owned and acquire economic value (Protto 1931), it even put the common understanding of authorship into question. In fact, such a statement overcame the neo-idealistic understanding of the musical experience as a direct communication between authors and audiences, that is, a vision that aimed at neutralizing the role of the interpreter. As the witness of performers' activity, the disc was not a mere intermediary anymore, a neutral passage, but rather a separate element within the process of music consumption.

From this topic a second issue stemmed in Rome 1928: Britain, in refusing to grant rights to performers, proposed to create an independent protection for supports (i.e. the disc as a material object) as 'second-hand work'. These words meant 'not a reproduction or published copy of a work' (Union internationale pour la protection des œuvres littéraires et artistiques 1929, p. 263), but rather a derivative, albeit autonomous, product of the original work. Although the British suggestion was considered by other members as quite contradictory (in fact, record fabricants would have been better acknowledged and protected than performers, and their work considered more valuable), similar issues concerning the epistemology of mechanical reproduction were discussed with reference to radio during the Rome revision: the question was raised as to 'whether broadcasting constituted a public reproduction, a performance or a recitation'

(Union internationale pour la protection des œuvres littéraires et artistiques 1929, p. 76).

To distinguish between reproduction and performance reveals an inclination to consider music performances by mechanical means something more than a mere copy of an abstract original: recordings were now a new product, in which not only the performer, but also technical mediation acquired a characterising role that could even be labelled as creative. It is evident that the discussion on interpreters' rights had cracked the monolithic concept of creation typical of the previous century, also shared by Italian neo-idealists. This is what Giannini stated shortly after the revision:

It is important to understand the meaning of the word *creation*. The musician is not the only one who creates[...]. Also who reproduces the music creates [...]. Even who sees a sculpture or a painting creates, because he recreates it with his imagination, or he displays it. The creative act will be different, but qualitatively it is always creation.

(Giannini 1931, p. 163)

Also connected to creation, a further point concerning phonography and copyright played a major role in promoting a more complex understanding of recorded sound, namely what kind of protection should be attached to recordings. Amedeo Giannini, who attended both the Bern revision in Rome 1928 as well as the first international congress of the phonographic industry in 1933 (also in Rome), had a leading role in the discussion, which reverberated on juridical periodicals of the time such as the Italian *Il diritto di autore* (author's right) or the German *Archiv für Urheber-, Film- und Theaterrecht* (archive for copyright, film and theatre law) The question arose whether recordings should be protected as an industrial product (i.e. as a material object) or as an artistic output. The issue stemmed from some crucial questions regarding the nature of recorded sound, which apparently occurred now for the first time. During the Congress of the phonographic industry in Rome 1933, Giannini suggested two different legal solutions: the first solution was to consider recordings as an industrial product (i.e. considering sound recording as an *object*) and protect them accordingly; alternatively, they could be acknowledged as a work of intellect, thus following what was decided by the Bern Convention and its subsequent revisions regarding the protection of artworks (Giannini 1934, p. 287). This latter solution was preferable in Giannini's eyes, also in view of future developments of the phonographic industry. It derived from some fundamental questions on the nature of sound recording, which seem to take full shape here for the first time:

Is it possible to consider the disc as a 'creation'? We have seen what the disc has become: an autonomous work of art, which must be created by an author. All the essential elements for disc production, both technical

and artistic, become elements of a complex work, where they harmonically blend into one: the disc.

(Giannini 1934, p. 277)

The difference between such a view and contemporary idealistic considerations of Crocian cultural circles towards recorded sound is indeed striking. The dichotomy between art – intended as a pure intellectual work – and technical objects, excluded from the aesthetical discourse because of their technical and material elements, was put into question by copyright experts, who acknowledged the epistemological condition of recordings (among others) to be in rapid evolution. Giannini went further in the aforementioned contribution:

If one observes carefully the current trend in the field of industrial and literary property, one can easily observe, on the one hand, the tendency to industrialise certain intellectual works and, on the other hand, the tendency to consider certain products, previously considered purely industrial, as protected intellectual works. Part of this movement are also the problems of the discs that concern us here.

(Giannini 1934, p. 277)

During the legal and industrial meetings of the 1930s, a multifaceted understanding of recorded sound took shape: phonography seemed to be gradually acknowledged as a manifold phenomenon, a complex creation involving different actors and skills. Moreover, disc production wasn't considered as a mere mechanical process anymore: to recorded sound and its production were now ascribed creative aspects, artistic features – and, therefore, a novel aesthetic value. Alfredo Jannoni-Sebastianini, director of the Bureau for intellectual property, wrote on the journal *Il diritto di autore*:

Disc production cannot be considered anymore as a simple material work, since its task does not consist in the pure and simple reproduction of specific sounds: it is necessary to make a special adaptation in order to obtain the desired sound effects in the record, and this adaptation work is intellectual work that under a certain point of view can also be said to be creative.

(Jannoni-Sebastianini 1935, p. 344)

Jannoni-Sebastianini's view was also shared by the phonographic magazine *Corriere musicale*, which supported and showcased the interests of the recording industry, and also appears to be the sole link between the musical and the juridical realms. In mentioning a decision made by German radio to stop broadcasting records (since radio had been suited by discs producers with respect to the payment of royalties), the Italian periodical wrote:

It is not enough to simply pay something to the author of the piece or to its publisher. It can and should be argued that they should be considered

as sharing the publishing rights, performance rights, etc. all those who in any case have worked on the realization of a record, which is a “work of art”, even if not a masterpiece: the phonographic publisher who publishes it, so that it can be purchased in the greatest possible number of copies, by the public of private phono-amateurs; the artist who sang the recorded piece; the conductor who “accompanied” it or who recorded the orchestral performance; the engraver, who takes every care to ensure that “that” record succeeds perfectly, etc. etc. etc.

(Giufer 1935, p. [1])

Thus, the Crocian dichotomy between work of art as output of pure intellect and anything that couldn't aspire to aesthetic reflection due to an overriding technical component appears now to be dismissed. The awareness of being in front of a complex object, such as to be able to aspire – at least in some cases – to the definition of artistic product and therefore not merely industrial, contributed to the idea that recording did not constitute an aesthetically neutral process. The recording process as well as to the listening practice of recorded music instead of live were acknowledged to carry a number of consequences in terms of aesthetic fruition of musical works. The 1933 Congress of phonographic industry in Rome fully displayed this new awareness. It was the Italian delegation to highlight it: starting from the idea of the disc as a blend of different elements, technical as well as artistic, Italians showed how recorded sound had already achieved the status of an artistically distinct element from the musical performance carried on supports:

Phonographic industry claims that the disc combines the contribution of the author, of the musical production (which includes both artistic and technical elements), and the packaging of the disc, which also encompass artistic components. Even more, we claim that what the disc offers to the listener is different from the elements it is made of, so that the disc holds a new artwork of multiple nature, which also recall what happens in the cinematography.

(1° Congresso internazionale dell'industria fonografica 1933, p. 566)

Conclusion

The results of juridical discussions didn't remain isolated. In February 1937, the Italian government passed a law meant to protect the recording industry (*Gazzetta Ufficiale* 1937, n. 111). But even more importantly, from the 1930s onwards, Italy experienced an unprecedented growth of recording-related discussions. At that time, the first periodicals and columns devoted to recorded sound were established, and a whole session was dedicated to recorded music at the first musical congress in Florence in 1933, involving personalities of international fame such as André Coeuroy and Ludwig Koch.

It is hard to tell whether copyright discussions played a role in this general enhancement of a ‘phonographic awareness’. But either way, they constituted

a relevant arena where narratives about recorded sound evolved, at least from the end of the 1920s. It has been already observed that with respect to radio, ‘the creation of laws and rules concerning the new medium contributed to form the affordances limiting the interpretation and use of the new medium’ (Balbi and Natale 2015, p. 31). Indeed, also in the case of phonography, legal discussion fostered a more articulated idea and concept of sound reproduction.

If we go back to Crocian neo-idealistic thought, an unequivocal and organic epistemological definition of recorded sound in interwar Italy appears quite hard to outline, especially since these two cultural arenas remained quite independent from each other. In fact, as I mentioned above, jurists and idealist thinkers hardly crossed each other paths, and continued being separate expressions of Italian cultural and social life. The outbreak of the Second World War shortly afterwards also contributed to annihilate any possible crossover between the two camps, and the world that emerged from the conflict was then profoundly changed and under the influence of very different cultural stimuli. Nonetheless, if we broaden the gaze to cultural history as a whole, as the sum – if not the entanglement – of several autonomous actors, then it is clear that many phenomena and events involving phonography in the 1930s was the result of the increased sensitivity towards phonography, which was also owed in part to these debates. Such a multifaceted reality, composed by contradictory phenomena, stemmed from different needs and premises. Even more importantly, debates on recorded sound in interwar Italy show how the phonographic discourse had a profound national connotation, since it was generated largely by two cultural contexts of which the first – Crocian idealism – was endemic and exclusive to the peninsula, whereas the other – the legal one – was shared by different parts of Europe, and yet particularly advanced in Italy. If, therefore, phonography in Italy between the two wars may appear ‘backward’ if considered from a merely technical or uncritically transnational perspective, it is, on the contrary, more than other national declinations particularly telling if intended as the output of ideas, laws and regulation stemmed from national needs, fostered by national (sometimes even nationalistic) agendas and inspired by national *Weltanschauungen*: ultimately, as the expression of a national culture.

Notes

- 1 All translations from Italian, French and German sources have been appointed by the author of this paper.
- 2 *Il dramma* and *Il disco* were both periodicals of cultural in-depth investigation on specific topics, but not designed for specialists. *Il dramma* was a magazine devoted to dramatic novelties and especially comedies, which was published from 1925 to 1968 (and until 1983 as a periodical of theatre, cinema and modern art), whereas *Il disco* was published by a music shop in Milan from 1933 to 1937. For further information about *Il disco*, see Zucconi (2015); on the central role of periodicals in interwar Italy, see Hallamore Caesar et al. (2011).
- 3 Beside the growth of recording industry worldwide, other factors (among many) can be considered the birth and spread of Italian broadcasting (1924), the

- foundation of the Italian national archive of recorded sound in Rome (*Discoteca di Stato*, 1928) and as we will see in the next pages, the growth of copyright laws and the aesthetic movement of the New Objectivism (*Neue Sachlichkeit*).
- 4 On the same topic, beside the aforementioned publications, see also, among others, Flichy (1991), Symes (2004), Gitelman (2003, 2006).
 - 5 I have already presented some of these results in Zucconi (2018). With regard to the theoretical part (but with a focus on broadcasting), see also Zucconi (2019).
 - 6 For further information about cultural and social conditions in fascist Italy, see Forgacs (1990) and Forgacs-Gundle (2007).
 - 7 The *Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phonogram Archive of the Austrian Academy of Sciences) was established in Vienna in 1899; in Germany, the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv dates back to 1900; and the British Institute of Recorded Sound in London in 1905. In 1908, the Sound Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences was founded, while in France *Les Archives de la parole* (archives of the voice) was [this is supposed to be a plural, right? I'd leave "were"] inaugurated in 1911 as part of the Sorbonne University.
 - 8 Beside many marketing-oriented editorial attempts, *The Gramophone* (founded in 1923) was the first serious magazine devoted to phonography to be regularly published in any language (LeMahieu, 1982).
 - 9 An exception in this sense is the consumption of Neapolitan music, both as sheet music and as gramophone records, by immigrants in the United States, especially in Philadelphia; see Siel Agugliaro's chapter in this book.
 - 10 It is no coincidence that foreign recording companies at that time carried out marketing projects on Italian territory, perhaps to bring the public closer to recorded music through elements that could be recognised as local and familiar. Between 1903 and 1904, for instance, the Italian branch of the Gramophone Company commissioned the most prominent Italian composers, such as Puccini, Leoncavallo, Mascagni, to write songs 'written specifically for the Gramophone' (*scritte espressamente pel Grammofono*) for the Italian market.
 - 11 Several factors contributed to the inclusion of recorded sound within cultural discourses at that time: the parallel development of other mechanical arts such as radio and cinema, which had an overwhelming impact in interwar Italy and fostered a consistent production of printed media; the receptiveness of many musicians towards discourses from beyond the Alps related to the issue of the interpreter, which indirectly affected phonography; and finally – as I will explain later on – the acknowledgement that recorded music could no longer be ignored, as it had become a massive phenomenon in the cultural and artistic fruition of the time.
 - 12 A decade later, Italian composer Gian Francesco Malipiero still claimed that the ideal performer should be 'a more or less perfect transmitting machine, who must renounce to his own personality in order to accomplish the mission he has been given' (Malipiero 1945, p. 108. Original in Italian).
 - 13 During the Berlin revision, the topic was introduced as follows:

[...] the manufacture of mechanical musical instruments has taken an unexpected development; considerable industries have been formed in various countries; millions of copies of increasingly noble pieces of music have been reproduced. It seemed to the German Administration that it would be most opportune to reconsider the question [...].

(Union international pour la protection des œuvres littéraires et artistiques 1910, pp. 258–9. Original in French)
 - 14 In 1926, the fascist government founded the Institut international pour l'unification du droit privé (International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) under the auspices of the League of Nations (Dommann, 2019, pp. 108–9).

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