Film Sound and Film Music Production Processes: an Ethnomusicological Perspective[1]
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The ethnomusicological research in which I have been engaged in the past few years largely concerns film sound production and post-production in Italy – studied both diachronically and synchronically – and film music in the contemporary North American film industry. These two processes – composition and sound effects postproduction – along with ADR[2] and, in Italian practice, dubbing foreign language films, take shape at the same time and rely on a vast network of professional figures (dozens and dozens) and facilities. The various working phases are only partially carried out in actual recording studios, which in any case are often significantly different from recording studios designed for popular music tracking and mixing. My research method was based on a systematic collection and analysis of the oral sources provided by technicians and other professionals, above all in diachronically studying Italian practices and analysing technological change over time. As regards my work done in Italy, verifying and collating oral sources allowed me to reconstruct with a good degree of precision, in a series of monographic studies, the history of post-production practices used by one of the main European post-production facilities based in Rome, International Recording; in the area of North American film music composition, this same procedure allowed me to study film music composers' work.

While my inquiry, which began around 2004, was still fully in progress, the panorama of film studies and musicology dealing with film music and film sound was undergoing remarkable changes, opening up to ethnographic research. In previous decades, using approaches bordering on a cultural-anthropological reading, specialised film studies had already looked into the ritual value given to stereotypes and narrative clichés, repetition and formulas in the system of film genres. Among the many works that appeared in this area, one must mention at least Schatz (1981) and, more recently, Schweinitz (2011). These are, however, studies whose undeniable anthropological slant is still oriented by a textualist approach. Increasingly close

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1   The present work is based on previous fieldwork whose results were published, mainly in Italian, in Meandri (2011, 2013, 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2019). A few paragraphs have been taken from these texts, along with all of the ethnographic data concerning the practices described here, inserted in a new context and broadened by previously unpublished methodological reflections. Any references to previously published texts are included in the footnotes. This article was translated into English by Brent Waterhouse.

2   In contemporary American practice the acronym ADR stands for Automated Dialogue Replacement, which consists in the actors of the film re-recording fragments whose quality was not good or segments for which it was not possible to use direct recording, for various technical reasons.

contact with early media anthropology,[3] and the birth of a transcultural and transnational field of enquiry, later gave way to a consistent number of works adopting an ethnographic or *quasi*-ethnographic[4] approach; here, the pre-eminent fields of research concerned production processes and audiences, areas in which direct observation – even while not always involving participant observation in a strictly ethnographic sense – is often decisive. A variety of *quasi*-ethnographic approaches thus emerged – however, providing even a partial review of the methodologies adopted does not fall within the scope of this contribution. What must be stressed is that many tools once exclusively used in studies inspired by ethnography and/ or sociology became more common in film studies and musicology especially in the last decade. These approaches include extensive use of qualitative interviews, network analysis and participant observation (a research methodology that has at times been defined as 'embedded research').[5] And yet, in this area, some mention (or even a simple acknowledgement of their existence) only rarely goes to important ethnographic precedents dedicated to film production and reception communities, such as the works by Hortense Powdermaker (1950) and Robert Faulkner (1971; 1983). The two studies that Faulkner dedicated to Hollywood musicians, in particular, bring a number of fields to overlap (ethnography and [ethno]-musicology, sociology of music, sociology of work and industry) and are still today little-known outside of these disciplines.

In my first paragraph, I will analytically, albeit briefly, examine these works. As I will argue more explicitly in my conclusions, these studies, as well as the ethnography of film production processes, cannot however be entirely labelled as 'ethnographies of recording studios', due among other things to the fact that by their very nature, film production processes take place over a variety of locations and involve a number of different facilities (as mentioned above, recording studios being only a part of these processes).[6]

In my second paragraph, I will briefly discuss the case of Italian sound effects and Foley artists. My aim is to demonstrate that extended research on oral sources is able to diachronically reconstruct the history of technologies and production processes, with a remarkable degree of precision. Lastly, I will consider, reflexively and retrospectively, some issues that emerged in the preceding paragraphs and, more generally, the problems that arose during my research experience.

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3   For a non-exhaustive list of texts on this topic, see: Spitulnik (1993); Peterson (2003); Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin (2002); Born (2004); Born (2005); Rothenbuhler and Coman (2005); Booth (2008); Tejaswini (2012); Martin (2017). See also the work of the Media Anthropology Network, European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), whose initiatives and conferences have given, in my opinion, a fundamental input to research in this area (http://www.media-anthropology.net, last access December 28th, 2023).

4   With the term *quasi*-ethnographic I refer to the use, within disciplines such as musicology or media studies in which fieldwork does not traditionally play a central role, of a sub-set of research methods borrowed from ethnography or sociology. As we shall see shortly, these methods come into play above all when studying production processes and audiences. Adopting these methodologies does not necessarily require a researcher to subscribe to the methodological and deontological paradigms found in ethnography, hence the prefix *quasi*. This is the case, for example, when work is carried out for an extended period of time with a partner in the industry (e.g. a major film producer or a company specialised in particular aspects of post-production), as part of an initiative in technological transfer. In reality, this work requires the use of participant observation, even though it is not explicitly qualified as such nor given the same methodological treatment. Other examples might include an extensive use, whether in media studies or in musicology, of qualitative interviews, network analysis or focus groups. None of these techniques, while falling within the methodological arsenal developed by ethnography and sociology, are used in specifically ethnographic or sociological studies. A good example of the latter approach is the work done by Sapiro (2016) on the relations between composer and orchestrator in North American and British cinema.

5   This term is used differently in different disciplines, most likely deriving from journalism ('embedded journalism', which describes a war reporter as an attaché of a military unit). Regardless of the fact that the choice of this label, which originally refers to journalistic practices that have been severely criticised, is not without its problems, it has been applied in other fields as well. When it appears in film studies, it is used to describe the case of researchers or technicians who carry out their research at the institution under investigation (e.g. in education, medicine), openly declaring their role as researchers and agreeing on a course of research with the personnel of the host institution. For a definition of the term, see MGinity and Salokangas (2014).

6   Powdermaker (1950) did not locate her research in the studios but carried out an actual study on moviemakers. The case of Faulkner (1971 and 1983) only partially concerns works that fall under this label, because both enquiries find *in musicians* and only marginally *in the studio* the underlying object investigated.

Hortense Powdermaker and Robert Faulkner:
some remarks on the works of two pioneers

Hortense Powdermaker (1896 - 1970) studied with Malinowski at the London School of Economics. Her earliest research shared the interest shown by anthropologists of the time towards primitive societies and is largely based on the theses maintained by Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, with whom she collaborated.[7] After meeting Edward Sapir at Yale University's IHR (Institute of Human Relations), Powdermaker gradually oriented her research towards contemporary American society. During the early 1930s as part of her fieldwork dedicated to the difficult relations between the white and African American communities in the South, which eventually led to one of her most distinctive works (*After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South*, 1939), she began working on an intuition that soon brought her to do fieldwork in the heart of Hollywood. In her time off work, Powdermaker became interested in movies, going to the theatres frequented by the local community. Her interest was piqued by the fact that the audience, both white and African American, tended to perceive these films as 'representations of real life' (Cherneff 1991: 431)[8]: we are aware that they are works of fiction, Powdermaker maintains, but we also believe – and this is one of the primary anthropological functions of these narrations – that they somehow contain *truths* as to how individuals lead their own lives. Many of the protagonists of the reception contexts explored by Powdermaker, above all those with a low level of education, did not clearly perceive the boundary between reality and fiction:

> Movies have a surface realism which tends to disguise fantasy and makes it seem true. [...] Since the people on the screen seem real and 'natural' and the backgrounds and setting honest, the human relationships portrayed must, the spectator feels, be likewise true. It is this quality of realness that makes the escape into the world of movies so powerful, bringing with it conscious and unconscious absorption of the screen play's values and ideas. The statement that the primary function of movies is entertainment is clearly not the end of the question. All entertainment is education in some way, many times more effective than schools because of the appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect. 'Precisely because they wear the warmth and color of the senses, the arts are probably the strongest and deepest of all educative forces' (Powdermaker 1950: 14).[9]

In *Copper Town: Changing Africa* (Powdermaker 1962) – a later work, in some regards more mature than *Hollywood*, *The Dream Factory* – Powdermaker concentrated her research on North Rhodesia (currently Zambia). Here, what interested her was the impact of Western film production on an isolated community of spectators, along with the relations between cinema and colonialism and the many cultural misconstructions created by cinema: for example, the local audience's unwillingness to fully acquiesce to the conventions of fiction narration, and their ensuing disapproval when a star who supposedly 'died' in a previous story reappeared in a new film. More conventional in its methods and its ethnographic context, *Copper Town* finds its place in the tradition of transcultural studies on audiences and reception communities, a topic that still today underlies the difficult and never entirely fulfilled attempt to theoretically systematise media anthropology. And yet, *Copper Town* lacks the courage and the ambition found in the innovative project behind *The Dream Factory*: bringing cultural anthropology into the heart of the pervasive 'shared truths' fuelled by the Hollywood studios. Powdermaker had initially conceived a cultural analysis of the content of these films – a model that cultural anthropology had already partially proposed, for example in Ruth Benedict's work on Japa-

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7   Among these works, mention must go to a dissertation on leadership in primitive societies (1928) and studies on the Papa New Guinea Lesu (published in 1933).

8   The majority of the biographical information provided here comes from the essay by Jill Cherneff (1991) published in a single issue of the 'Journal of Anthropological Research' entirely dedicated to the legacy of Hortense Powdermaker.

9   In the internal quotation, Powdermaker cites a report by the Harvard Committee entitled *General Education in a Free Society*. The previous paragraph and the following ones, until the words 'passes from orchestration to composition' have been translated, with modifications, from Meandri (2012: 23ss.).

nese cinema or Bateson's on Nazi cinema.[10] Her project aimed at understanding which stories were read by the community as examples of real life that could inspire and guide their lives, and in so doing understand how many of these stories could function as 'culture patterns' (a term clearly modelled on the one used by Benedict). After her initial interest in the reactions of a community audience, followed by an anthropologically oriented project in textual analysis, her research project soon reached a decisive turning point. During a preliminary discussion with director Pàl Fejös, Powdermaker became convinced that it was not possible to fully understand the repercussions of these films without being acquainted with the cultural setting ('the social-psychological milieu', Cherneff 1991: 431) in which they were produced. Powdermaker therefore opted to write an ethnography of the studios, including the 'movie makers' and the vast community that supported the Hollywood production system, with the ambitious idea of understanding Hollywood in relation to the 'dreams' it produces and their links with contemporary society. Her work describes the various professional figures who collaborate in creating a film, and the relations between these figures: this is basically an analysis of the social organisation of a production system, including the variables that influence the process, and the economic and power relations that governed the entertainment industry at the time. The main thesis in *The Dream Factory* is that these films reflect values that are engrained in the production processes themselves and that are consequentially imposed on audiences. (Powdermaker 1950: 3). Analysing the production context is thus inescapable if one wishes to understand the phenomenon of Hollywood as a whole. As has been noted by Jill Cherneff, *The Dream Factory* is not only the first ethnography of the film industry, but remained for quite some time the only one:

> Mass culture is our most socializing influence in the twentieth century, surpassing the Church and challenging the family and the state as a socializing force [...]. The Hollywood film industry is among the most powerful and dynamic of the institutions of this mass culture. Yet, anthropologists have rarely studied the film industry as an institution that affects social values and culture (Cherneff. 1991: 429).

A variety of reasons explain the lack of endorsement from the academic community for Powdermaker's work, first and foremost the somewhat limited nature of her text (it is worth stressing, however, that its immaturity is directly proportional to its pioneering nature). As maintained once again by Cherneff (1991: 433), in the first chapter of *The Dream Factory* Powdermaker goes to some effort to restrict the geographical extent of her investigation, while fully aware of the high degree of mobility of the artists, professionals and businessmen involved. This rather rigid 'classic' ethnographic methodology, applied to such an extraordinary contemporary context, should perhaps have been deeply revised. In Powdermaker's work, Hollywood is at times described according to the canons of classic ethnography – introducing its context, for example, by providing information on its topography, climate and inhabitants. In other passages instead, which break away from the ethnographic traditions then in force, Powdermaker replaces the concept of Hollywood as a region with a more engaging reflection on Hollywood as a society and as a symbol (Cherneff 1991: 433). The setting provided by her informal interviews, which is already strongly mediated in this research context, sometimes comes across as an obstacle, more than a means able to establish an adequate contact with her 'informers'. Within a social network that, as regards its more significant relational transactions, is built upon exclusion – or at the very least a severe restriction put on any subject

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10   Ruth Benedict worked on the analytic reports drafted by military experts on twenty Japanese films (OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES, RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS BRANCH 1944) and discussed their context, plot, the role of the characters and the social conventions narrated in them, with her Japanese collaborators. It is not entirely clear whether this took place while watching the films with them or comparing their respective points of view on the content of the films after the fact (in any case, they did not discuss specifically visual aspects of the films: cf. Yoshihara 1999: 172). This work became one of the main tools for Benedict's collaboration with the American armed forces during the war, in particular with the OWI (Office of War Information) from 1943 to 1945, which later led to the famous essay *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Benedict 1946), which often refers to the films as sources of information and a means for investigating Japanese culture. As is well known, Bateson instead worked on the Nazi propaganda film *Hitlerjunge Quex: Ein Film vom Opfergeist der deutschen Jugend* (1933, Hans Steinhoff) and the analytic results of his work were included in Mead and Métraux (1953). For a recent study that contextualises Bateson's work in this area, see also Marabello (2018).

who has not been professionally 'initiated' (for example, through the decisions involved in production, or the many phases of the creative process) – a classical approach to participant observation that does not put into question its own methodological foundations appears today to be somewhat naïve. Some reviewers contested its partial lack of scientific criteria, in particular the excessive condescendence shown towards the anecdotes that make up the majority of the interviews. These anecdotes, that is, are not put into question, but acritically taken as primary sources, whereas their value as anecdotes and even the self-representations of the subjects themselves could have been critically deconstructed, eventually leading to further enquiry. The reviews of the book that appeared in 1950 were quick to trivialise its content, contributing considerably to a reading that produced the most severe attacks: «it makes Hollywood seem like just another tribe, worthy of an anthropological report» (Cherneff 1991: 432). The 'New York Times' defined the book as: «a report on a twelve-month expedition through the wilds of Hollywood» (Cherneff 1991: 432). A few more penetrating reviews dwelt instead on the strong protest witnessed in Hollywood when the book came out. What they noted was that the loopback between the results of the fieldwork and the reaction of the figures involved, who were no longer 'illiterate primitives', marked the birth of a '*new style* of anthropological fieldwork':[11] well before deconstructionism, well before James Clifford, post-colonial studies and the emancipation of anthropologies of the other, both Powdermaker's works and the debate they raised have much to say about this initial but significant loss of innocence in cultural anthropology.

Let us consider, within the complex structure of a film production team, the more limited case of the film composer and the group that collaborates in creating the soundtrack. One of the major objections that can legitimately be raised against contemporary film music criticism is that it has not fully freed itself from the myth of the composer, as portrayed by the industry. With respect to the aesthetic facts and musical culture to be interpreted, while still somehow imprisoned in the vast amount of anecdotes surrounding the composer, two main aspects of criticism appear to be lacking: distance and autonomy. An anecdotal perspective still seems to hold many texts, even academic ones, in its grip – the same anecdotes to which Powdermaker's detractors accused her of passively submitting, since the ethnography of her time had only begun to provide itself with more mature tools able to deconstruct the subjects' own *mise-en-scène*.[12] These anecdotal constructions are more often than not a product, a question of marketing: they are the only point of contact conceded to audiences, skilfully constructed by the agents' promotional (and self-promotional) apparatus, modelled around the target to whom the message is addressed. The myriad of sources available today – whether quotations of composers taken up by scholars, field interviews, handbooks for student composers or musicians' contributions to the meta-genre of the *making-of* – are all *mediatised writing*, with a strong *tendency towards apophthegmatic expression*. Here, the anecdote is at the service of the system's ideology, a *public communication of the role of the artist*, *branding*, construction and socialisation of the myth of the composer, in the shadow of a larger, ritual celebration of cinema, its products and the value of a given film, i.e. the 'magnificent machine' of the film industry). Quite frequently, for example, a composer's statements for the specialised press are aimed at construing the composer as a *problem solver*: in the ideology of production, those who are promoted are the ones who *ensure that the machine functions properly* and who guarantee that the entire process remains *fluid*, solving problems and treating the overwhelming difficulties in a given production – which are the norm – as creative possibilities. Naturally, it is not necessary for the subjects in question to personally subscribe to this ideology. On the contrary, an accurate analysis would show that this is a problematic issue, conflictual on a biographic level; their public communications, or the advertising involved in self-promoting their own role, however, are deeply affected by it. It is fairly common to note, for example,

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11 The quotation taken from Cherneff (1991: 433) comes from Linton (1951).

12 I am referring, for example, to the work by Bateson and Mead, which was seminal in founding a new and more mature understanding of cultural anthropology and its use of visual means of research, i.e. *Balinese Character* (Bateson and Mead 1942) which, while dating to eight years earlier, does not seem to have influenced Powdermaker's 1950 study.

that the idea of the film composer (along with the orchestrators and the other members of the music department) as a problem solver is redundant enough in the sources for us to recognise a real work ethics/ideology within the production machine. Elsewhere, the composer may attempt to designate himself as a specialist in one genre or another; or, on the contrary, he may try to escape from a typecasting[13] that is ultimately dangerous for his career. Again, he may seek occasions for marketing, such as the imminent release of the soundtrack album or other events; at times, he may have to manage 'political' relations with studios, filmmakers[14] or his fellow composers, perhaps promoting a faithful collaborator who, for instance, passes from orchestration to composition.

When carrying out qualitative interviews with composers, it is therefore extremely difficult to liberate oneself from the framing inherent in the interview and the rules of its prescriptive *self-mise-en-scene*, following which the subject interprets their own status within the production system. It is only rarely possible, owing to the degree of privacy to which all of the more significant technical-creative phases of the process are legally bound, to engage in a type of traditional fieldwork based on participant observation. Even when the network of mediation has allowed for this sort of presence, the high number of processes taking place at the same time makes it impossible, practically speaking, for a single researcher to apply participant observation to the entire production and post-production process. The problem with research carried out 'at a distance', as noted in other terms by Benedict (1946) and later by Mead and Métraux (1953), is that in many media ethnographies it comes up against a structural limit; this problem remains surprisingly under-theorised from a methodological point of view.

Precisely with regard to these problematic aspects, the two works Robert Faulkner dedicated to Hollywood musicians seem to me, even today, to be particularly original. Here, I will concentrate on a few issues raised in the first of these two monographs, which discusses film composers (*Music on Demand*, 1983). For a lack of space, I will not dwell on his equally interesting work on the orchestras and musicians involved in recording film music (*Hollywood Studio Musicians*, 1971).

Faulkner, with his training as a sociologist, must certainly be recognised as the first researcher who attempted to describe the complex world of film composers from a sociological and ethnographic point of view. His study does not turn to participant observation but uses extended qualitative interviews with composers, whose anonymity he preserves. One of the strong points of Faulkner's approach is the role he gives to anecdotes as a source that, if correctly interpreted, helps shed light on the ethics of the small community of mainstream Hollywood composers' 'working constitution'. Although, as has been noted among others by Bates (2016: 113-114), not all of Faulkner's conclusions can be generalised and applied to other production contexts, his methodology, in particular his interpretation of anecdotes and his representation of the social network, can be illuminating for similar contexts (and proved to be so, in my personal experience in research on North American film and the production contexts of Italy). As Faulkner maintains, the stories told by protagonists, technicians and creative film artists are often built around examples and anecdotes that, upon being analysed, reveal a coherent thematic organisation. Within these communities, anecdotes take on more than one function. Firstly, they regulate the subject's position within the power relations that characterise the social network. Their task, which is not negligible, is to keep the subject's name alive within the community: the more effective the anecdote, the higher its chances of circulating from one person to the next – in the framework of a competitive environment and a struggle to gain hegemony within the relational network. On a deeper level, however, as mentioned above, anecdotes offer an excellent way to comprehend the ethics of a 'working constitution'. The way in which stories and examples are constructed and shared often serves to regulate the creative, deontological and behavioural boundaries of a given creative sub-community (e.g.

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13 Typecasting indicates the tendency to identify a given composer as a specialist in a certain genre of films, giving them a label that while perhaps allowing them to rise more quickly if they are at the beginning of their career, also endangers their chances of reaching a more mature standing within the Hollywood film industry.

14 From here on, the term filmmakers globally indicates both the producers and the director, understood as those who have the most power in focusing the film music composer's work.

the sub-communities of technicians, Foley artists, orchestrators, composers, etc.). They set the limits within which a subject (or a professional sub-community) may legitimately act, defining the relations in which they are involved and meeting certain expectations, whose parameters are set by anecdotes. In Faulkner's words:

> These stories contain scenarios which help participants remember what filmmakers and composers experienced in the past. They facilitate filling in the gaps in their knowledge with educated guesses, and help predict what will occur in the future. Stories reassure the freelancer on the move that his image of himself as a freelance composer is shared by others. War stories and scenarios serve a means for regulating members of the occupation. [...] War stories are potent means for creating normative, instrumental, and effective commitment among the industry's labor force (Faulkner 1983: 166).

In all of the cases considered by Faulkner – and in many others I have attempted to examine myself during my research – anecdotes have the fundamental function of sharing, within a community, a series of recurring situations that a composer must face. Rationalising the setting, reducing a variety of situations to a limited number of cases, is a fundamental process used to create types, a sort of functional *self-ethnography* that, by creating a shared culture, suggests possible strategies for adaptation and relational behaviour. Moreover, the stories shared take on certain traits according to the sub-community in question. Directors share a vast amount of anecdotes on their relation with composers; orchestrators, in turn, share their own regarding a wide range of composers. Composers, or the members of the music department, are naturally not the only groups in which anecdotes serve these purposes. The following story comes from my research on Italian Foley artists, and concerns the work done on *L'eclisse*, 1962, by Michelangelo Antonioni. This is how Foley artist Italo Cameracanna recalls one particular episode:

> I had just started, and the film we were working on was *L'eclisse*, by Antonioni [1962]. It was Sunday, and we were preparing the room at International Recording. The film starts and we watch the first reel, with this beautiful sequence, very rarefied, with Monica Vitti who at a certain point, out of the silence, picks up a little wooden frame and puts it on the table. Renato [Marinelli] and I, on our table, had prepared all our objects and Renato, when the time came, picks up an object and puts it back down on the table. The recording stops, the light comes on and the assistant director walks into the room [omissis] and says: «Marinelli, how did you make that noise? You can tell it doesn't come from wood». So we stop everything and spend more than an hour looking for an object that would satisfy this assistant director for the wooden frame being set down. But everything we tried had something wrong with it, listen to this, listen to that, nothing was good enough. So the assistant director comes back into the room with a plank that was three metres long, saying we had to do the sound with this plank. I remember that Renato told him: «Listen, what do you expect us to do with this plank? How do you want us to put it down on the table? I mean, it doesn't make any sense. The frame she sets down is just a little square, it's tiny.» So the guy answers: «Yes, but at least this is made of wood!» So anyway, long story short, it's noon already, we'd only done a little bit of the first reel, and the technician says: Alright gentlemen, it's time for lunch, see you at two o'clock. Renato winks at me and says: «Grab our stuff, we're leaving». So I put the suitcases in our car, we leave and we don't come back. Renato gets a phone call at home, and he calmly explains to them: «You see, we can't keep working on the film like this, a whole shift for a little wooden frame, we can't work like that guy wants us to, we can't do the sound like that». So the moral of the story is that the producers convinced Renato to come back and work on the film, and yes, we came back, but that assistant director didn't set foot in that room ever again! (Meandri 2011: 207-208).

Compared to the methods used in creating sound effects at the time, the assistant director's requests seem particularly eccentric, but they also may very likely have come from the director himself. During those years, Antonioni was involved in a sound and audiovisual experimentation that began with *L'Avventura* (1960) and reached its most organic results in *L'Eclisse* (1962) and *Deserto Rosso* (1964). The tenuous and rarefied soundscape of these films was created through a skilful orchestration of the various elements found in the soundtrack – voices, noises, music. This composition, or this art of sounds – in which the images seem to emerge out of the soundscape, and the soundscape out of the world the images explore – reaches its peak in the famous finale of *L'Eclisse*, which has a *quasi*-documentary or observational quality and is at the same time densely subjective, and has been compared to an

orchestral composition.[15] As Maurizio Corbella argued when discussing *Deserto Rosso*, with an interpretation that is certainly valid for *L'Eclisse* as well:

> 'Traditional' musical syntax, whose calibrated tension had permeated classic narrative cinema, is completely excluded from this film, so much so that the acoustic events are transformed into phenomena to be observed (Corbella 2010: 167).[16]

Coming back to the story told by Italo Cameracanna I believe that the assistant director's requests perfectly reflected Antonioni's poetic research. In his intentions, clearly, each single sound that acts as punctuation in the rarefied opening sequence had to have a distinct material quality. Seen from the point of view of the Foley artists, however, the story shows the degree to which an audiovisual creation is defined through an encounter with a given practice, with which even the most refined artistry must negotiate. In Italy, as of the late 1940s, postproduction prior to the final transcription on the optical medium gradually passed to magnetic tape, which enormously facilitated the recording process. Before this period, however, sound recording was done on optical negative and editing on optical positive. The Foley artist saw the loop, prepared the effects and recorded them, only having the chance to make two takes, the second of which could be obtained by reversing the film negative. In rare cases where the two preceding takes failed and a third take was necessary, it was mandatory to load a new negative onto the optical camera, which made the cost rise considerably. Furthermore, the sound negative had to be developed in order to control the result. This means that, before the introduction of working practices involving magnetic tape, the artist-artisan in question had to create sound effects in real time, with an almost perfect synchronisation and without the possibility to monitor the work as it was being done. This technical tradition of the school of Foley artists was maintained even after the transition to magnetic tape. Even though it then became possible to record an indefinite number of new takes, by creating the effects in real time and only using a few takes it was still possible to save on the number of shifts required to finish the job: the skills honed in the optical era thus continued across an entire cycle of technological innovation, becoming a true tradition. Even today, one of the main criteria used in judging a Foley artists' talent is their ability to finish the reel with precision and with the lowest possible number of takes, the lowest number of secondary tracks and the least amount of post-synchronisation. The chances that a freelance artist would be called back for another production partially depended on their ability to work precisely and rapidly. The limitations imposed by optical audio and the rudimental means available at the time thus lie at the origin of the Italian school of Foley artists' repertory of techniques. On this matter, one might point out that the type of work proposed by Antonioni's assistant director, with few effects added during each shift, would have been advantageous in economic terms for the Foley artists, since it would have called for more shifts before all the reels of the film were completed. But tradition – and dignity, and professional deontology – prevailed over purely economic factors. The limited number of Foley artists, and their high degree of specialisation, meant that in this period they virtually held a monopoly. During the 1960s, these same conditions led them to form a true cartel, whose negotiating power was enormous at the time (much greater than in post-production today, which sees many more freelance professionals working in sound effects than in the past), and anecdotes, shared among the workers and known by all, established the limits within which one could bow to directors' requests and the terms within which their own creative autonomy and professionalism could be or had to be defended.

Many more examples could be mentioned. A very well-known director, whose name I will omit, asked the production to prepare a swimming pool where, according to him, Foley artist Renato Marinelli would create the sound effects for a character seen swimming in one scene of the film, Marinelli would thus swim himself, to obtain – according to the director's beliefs

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15 Cf. Pusateri (2019: 34). On audiovisual construction in Antonioni see also Calabretto (2012).
16 Corbella (2010: 167) [my translation].

– greater 'realism' in the sound. Marinelli categorically refused: to create the aquatic effects he would use the same method as always, involving one or more basins full of water, creating the effects with his hands, as is habitual still today for footsteps and bodies (human or animal) or objects that move on or underwater. This refusal, naturally, is not to be understood as a lack of willingness to compromise. In cases in which a director has knowledge of and respect for traditional practice, the ideas exchanged with sound effect artists can be deeply engaging. This is Italo Cameracanna, on the 'silence' desired by Pasolini:

> For *Uccellacci e Uccellini* [1666], Pasolini himself chose the place where we would record the silence and the air he wanted for his film. He said to Renato: «If you go to the Appian Way, you will find true silence, the silence I'm interested in». He knew these places well, because he used to go for long walks there. So, Renato and I went there: it was the open countryside, extremely silent, with no trees, very barren, and with a very particular sound. It was an open environment, but very silent, far from the city. There were no birds because there were no trees, it was all covered in meadows, so you could hear this silence that was full of living sound. Renato and I went back to the Appian Way because we noticed that in that silence, trains went by on the railway. So we went back and took our Nagra to record the ambient sounds with the trains in the distance, it was very beautiful (Meandri 2011: 197).

Having briefly dealt with the problem of anecdotes and their functions, I would now like to go back to North America and discuss what I believe to be a second great merit of Faulkner's work, i.e. the first attempt to ethnographically describe the so-called 'starting lines' of Hollywood's music industry in the 1970s and the 1980s, including the production system and the ideology that governs it, as well as the mechanisms through which composers are selected and survive within a freelance system. As Faulkner maintains: «careers are not made overnight. They are slow accumulations of credits» (Faulkner 1983: 66). Ethnographic enquiry is essential in order to explain this complex interweaving of credits and relations, which are the truly hidden part of the system. In his view, this is also necessary in order to compensate for something we briefly touched on in the examples given above, that is, social actors' tendency to be reticent when providing information about the fundamental patterns that allow professionals to gain access to and persist in the professional network.

Let us consider one traditional starting line, i.e. television series.[17] In the 1970s and the 1980s, television series production was in any case one of the most important breeding grounds for future mainstream composers. This is how Faulkner describes the mechanisms involved:

> Series composers find themselves hemmed in with too little time and too much music to write. Episodes to be scored start arriving late from the editors; the producer and director decide the dailies are awful, recut many scenes, call the composer and ask him to rescore some of the work he has already done; work piles up, pressure mounts, good will evaporates. Pressed by these exigencies, the freelancer does what he can in a craftsmanlike and professional way, but as deadlines tighten around him, he turns to his network of colleagues (Faulkner 1983: 52-53).

The composer hired for the job could thus recruit, within the network, younger colleagues with little production experience. According to the ethnographic evidence gathered by Faulkner, amply confirmed by my own research, the latter must generally show that they are able to work coherently with the materials chosen by the composer hired for the job. If this expectation is satisfied, the aspiring composer is guaranteed the chance to establish an ongoing relation with both the main composer and the filmmakers. This initial experience may be felt as extremely restrictive and is indeed a delicate moment: with every new step, the conflict between the system's idiomatic requirements and the beginner's need to construct a recognisable style of their own will never be entirely resolved. The way in which the beginner handles this conflict may be the key factor that determines whether or not he/she will remain within the system. After passing from this series, for which he/she is now responsible, to a more important one, and from here to a film production, having to cope with tight deadlines and hoping to obtain other commissions, this musician will often in turn

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17   In today's scenario, we should probably mention a few other equally plausible starting lines, already present in the 1970s and the 1980s but now much more developed, such as trailer music, advertising and the increasingly significant sector of music for videogames, on which we shall not currently dwell.

recruit another colleague into the network, a co-composer he/she can rely on. From an ethnographic point of view, the recruitment system is regulated by a chain of recommendation. The beginner, promoted by circumstances and soon becoming a sponsor, generally chooses a flexible subject who is quick to adapt to linguistic conventions (these same characteristics also govern the relationship between the composer and the other members of the music team, such as his/her relationship with the orchestrator). The amount of time that the sponsor must dedicate to training the beginner is a decisive factor in defining how long the new collaborator will remain in the system: a highly adaptable beginner who rapidly complies with the composer's style will require the sponsor to make less corrections to their cues, making it more likely that bonds will be formed between the sponsor and the beginner, leading to further collaboration.[18] Naturally, the social/creative initiation implied by their role and the limits set on their creative autonomy will be felt by the beginner, becoming a source of considerable tension. Most of the thematic material on which the newcomer has to work is taken, in the case of a series, from cues composed previously by the higher-ranking composer. The beginner is generally encouraged by the composer to maintain the highest possible consistency in the dramaturgical and stylistic treatment of this material. In the case of trailer music production – another possible starting line for film composers – the same idiomatic requirements are generally imposed by the owners of the company, senior composers and the rigid conventions that dominate trailer dramaturgy: formulas and clichés, which the young composer must rapidly assimilate and reproduce. If the aspiring composer succeeds in remaining within the system – we might imagine them working on a hypothetical television series – it is likely that sooner or later the senior composer will make progress in their own career and move on to larger projects. As of the moment in which the beginner has been promoted and is now a sponsor and mentor, the composer can start taking decisions that gradually introduce their own dramaturgical taste, within the strict linguistic conventions imposed by the medium and by filmmakers, who, as a rule, prefer to solve similar dramaturgical problems with habitual and time-tried solutions. The example briefly put forward here is essential in order to understand, *in its power structure*, the origin of the conformism and conventionality of mainstream musical-filmic language, its formulaic nature and the function of clichés in guaranteeing the system's coherence. As mentioned above, the composer's personal autonomy and stylistic integrity, even while broadening the number of their collaborations and hopefully obtaining new commissions, will constantly have to deal with the medium's rigid linguistic conventions. As I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere (Meandri 2014), the movement that propagates outwards from the centre of the recruitment network is essentially responsible for the genre's higher or lower linguistic inertia, and this perspective is crucial for an ethnomusicological comprehension of this productive system. According to Faulkner, the centre of the matrix – 'Big Hollywood', i.e. the network of the most influential and visible composers – can be ethnographically described as the 'tangible social structure determined by the crystallization of recurrent ties between filmmakers and composers' (Faulkner 1983: 193). In a dominant position, the composer develops a combination of *strong ties* (recurrent ties) and *weak ties* (non-recurrent ties on a multiple relational chain), i.e. ties with many different filmmakers.[19] This position, ideal within the matrix of relations, protects the composer from the fate met with by any single film or the success of any single filmmaker. Ties with different producers and directors protect the composer from the risk of typecasting, giving him a creative autonomy that, even while respecting the medium's rigid requirements as to idioms, genres and musical formulas, could not exist at the fringes of the system. On the one hand, the mainstream's strongly conservative outlook is engrained in the social structure and production ideology that organises the system. On the other, and this is where I have tried to integrate Faulkner's

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18 Clearly, this general case does not imply that significant exceptions to the rule do not exist, for example, a director at the beginning of their career or even a successful one may choose a composer who has no prior experience in the mainstream and who precisely for this reason may conceive their score in an unidiomatic way.

19 These concepts are stated by Faulkner (1983). Some sentences from the preceding paragraph of this chapter, while modified, come from Meandri (2012: 67-68) and Meandri (2014).

thesis, the medium's highly formulaic attitude and the prescriptive nature of musical-filmic dramaturgy reinforce the matrix; the latter being the chain of sponsorship and recruitment that governs the entire network, from the fringe to the centre, following the directions in which the relations of power and influence that support the social structure are propagated. From an ethnomusicological point of view, that is, it is possible to grasp, as both an aesthetics and a *social structure*, the close continuity in musical-filmic stylistic traits and the origin of the system of formulas and clichés that characterises the production framework of contemporary North American cinema.

Oral accounts and production processes in the work of Italian Foley artists

In this paragraph I would like to briefly discuss the context of my research on Italian Foley artists. I will firstly provide a rapid overview of the production process, followed by some more general remarks concerning methodology.

At the time referred to in the anecdote that mentioned *L'Eclisse*, Foley artists were employed exclusively for Foley stage sounds. This photograph of Renato Marinelli, master Italian Foley artist, captures the process well.

Figure 1. Renato Marinelli (left) on the main recording stage at International Recording, ca. 1961-62. Marinelli Effetti Sonori (courtesy of Marco and Massimo Marinelli). At the centre, editor Enzo Alabiso. The woman can plausibly be identified as singer Lara Saint Paul.
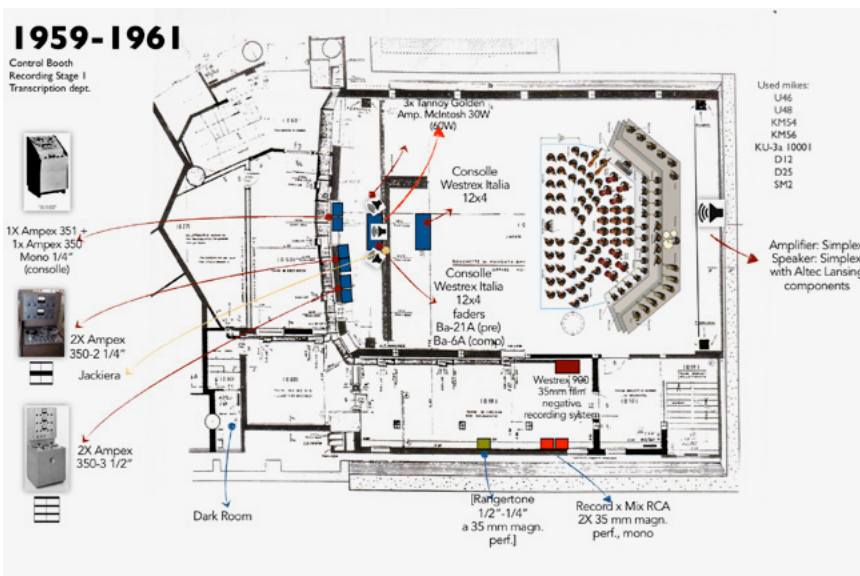
Figure 2. Original plan of the music control room and orchestral recording studio at International Recording. Reconstruction, based on oral sources and documentary evidence, of the position of the equipment, represented by rectangles in different colours. Source: Meandri (2016a: 449. Source of the original plan: International Recording Archive, courtesy of Paolo Biondo).
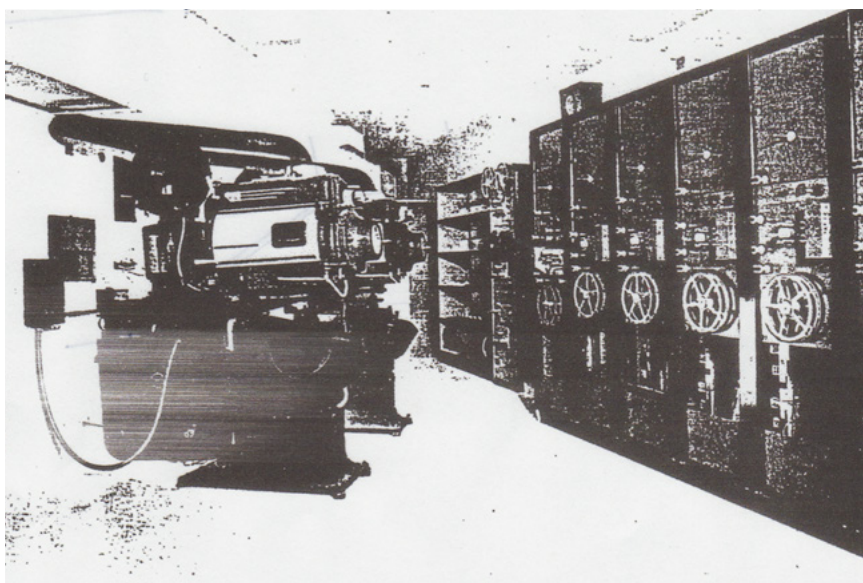

Figure 3. The projection booth at International Recording in a photo dating to 1959. Source: Meandri (2013: 45). Original source: International Recording Archive, courtesy of Paolo Biondo.
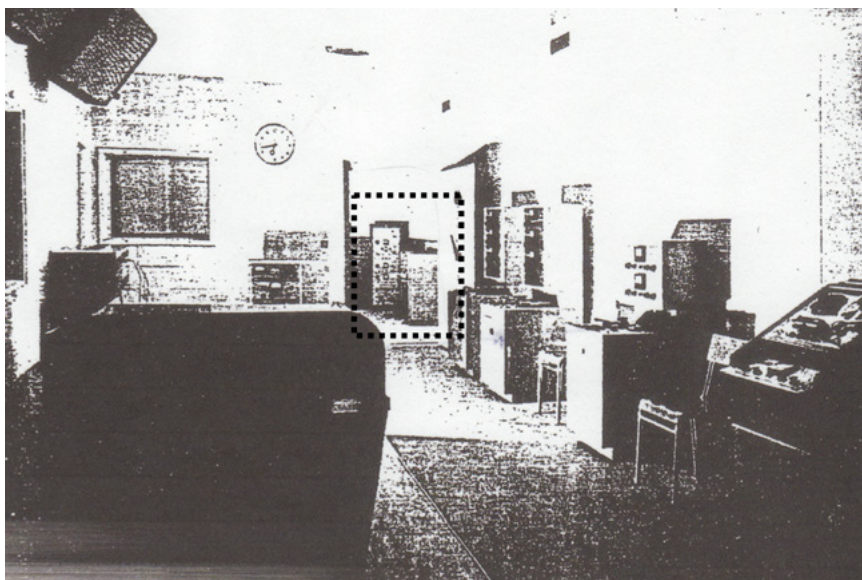
Figure 4 The music control room at International Recording in a photo taken a few weeks before the facility was inaugurated in 1959. The 1-, 2- and 3-track Ampex used during the facility's first operating period can be identified. Source: Meandri (2013: 33). Original source: International Recording Archive, courtesy of Paolo Biondo.

Documents, interpreted by oral sources, allowed me to accurately reconstruct International Recording's technological equipment during the 1950s and the 1960, along with the main cycles of technological innovation from the time when the facility opened to the digitalisation of post-production processes. Given that providing a detailed discussion of each piece's cycle of innovation would be extremely complex, at present I will offer no more than a 'static' snapshot of the equipment used in the early 1960s. The image reproduced in Figure 3, taken a few weeks before inauguration, shows International Recording's projection booth. The projectors are two ICP Simplex models. Only partially visible on the right are the twelve records for 35mm perforated magnetic tape – RCA make, Film Phonograph model – to which two optical heads, not visible in this image, must be added.

In Figure 4 we see the control room for music recording, located under the projection booth. It contains two mono Ampex models, two 2-track Ampex 351 models and two 3-track Ampex 351 models on ½-inch tape. The control room console was a 12-channel produced by Westrex Italia. According to several sources, this was the first fader console installed in an Italian studio. A mechanical system of wires, moved by the fader, acted upon a Deven potentiometer, already in use in the RCA consoles. The preamplifiers, compressors and filters were manufactured entirely by RCA: BA-21A preamps, BA-23A amplifiers, and BA6 compressors. The control room speakers were three Tannoy Golden models arranged in a horseshoe formation around the console, amplified by three McIntosh 35W. We can glimpse (highlighted in the dotted box) the electronics of the optical sound-on-film recorder, a variable-area RCA Photophone – galvanometer system.

The transcription department included a 35mm record with a ¼-inch tape player for transcribing direct sound recordings. According to Alberto Sbroscia, former technical director of International Recording, this machine was locally assembled with electronics from Perfectone which could read the pilot frequency of the ¼-inch tapes – such as, from 1961, the Nagra with Neopilot sync. Technical details apart, it was through this machine that ambient sounds and special sound effects were processed. Transcribed onto 35mm perforated magnetic tape, the special sound effects – such as a passing car or a gunshot, in other words, effects requiring precise synchronisation, were synchronised in Moviola. The high-cost tapes required the use of static-magnetic junctions, i.e. the insertion of a given length of 35mm placeholder film (termed 'static' in Italian procedure) where there were no effects. Of particular interest is the fact that in the most refined establishments, or in large-scale projects or highly rarefied soundscapes – the rarefied soundtracks of an Antonioni again come to mind – the reel was not joined to

static film, but to pre-recorded magnetic tape, to prevent the hissing of the tape from being suddenly silenced in the static segments. This use of blank-recorded tape evens out and masks the background noise caused by magnetic recording: noise has aesthetic value, confirming the insight of those who rightly argue that during restoration, noise and the remediation chain which produced it should be treated with care. Following Moviola synchronisation, the reel was mounted on the tape heads for the sound effects pre-mix, which was done reel by reel. With rare exceptions, ambient sounds did not require precise synchronisation and were organised and loaded in loops on the tape heads, supported by specially constructed loop-holders. The premix output was recorded on 35mm records located in the transcription department. The reels containing effects, dialogue and music premixes – I will not discuss the last two here – were then in turn loaded on to the tape heads for the final mix, whose output was always recorded on RCA mono records, then transcribed on 35mm film negative, i.e. the final phase of postproduction – *optical transcription* – which was done using an *optical recorder*, and was followed, generally at the facility where the photo negative was printed, by the phase in which images and sound were coordinated and, still later, a quality control carried out by the postproduction facility, which if passed meant that the soundtrack was officially completed.[20] The facility's initial entire set of equipment has been reconstructed in the diagram seen in Figure 2. The instruments in this setting, however, had rather short lives and, as mentioned earlier, the diagram represents the setting in the first few months in which the facility operated (late 1959 – early 1960).

Let us now consider the work of the Foley artist within the postproduction process as briefly described above. During these years, the recording stage of a postproduction facility was used for various purposes: one shift might see a singer recording with a group (Mina, for example, recorded her most well-known songs in this hall), while the next might be dedicated to an orchestra recording film music; the stage might be used for mixing a film (on these occasions, a mobile Westrex mixing console was brought to the centre of the room), and during yet another shift Foley artists might record here. Generally, they used smaller rooms, such as the ones located in the basement of the facility and also used for dubbing, but, if required, all these activities could also take place in the large room, i.e. the recording stage suitable for recording ensembles or orchestras. In its golden years, a postproduction facility worked around the clock, with the first shifts beginning at dawn and the last ending late at night. Foley artists, hired as freelance artists by the production, would enter the studio with suitcases containing equipment for the effects, such as the ones seen in Figure 1. These were artisans who mostly invented their techniques on the job, passing them down from father to son; they belonged to the urban working class in post-war Rome. Some Foley artists began, for instance, as *cascatori* (i.e. 'fallers', or stuntmen) hired by productions from among the humblest classes on the outskirts of the city. It was in this period that the image of the Foley artist as a magician of sound effects was born, and in fact they really were magicians: the legendary pioneers of Italian Foley managed to produce everything from nothing. In the reconstruction on which we are currently working, a fork on a metal sheet was enough to produce any creaking sound, a hand swept over sand to simulate a hydrant, shaking a box of rocks stood in for the sound of a carriage, a chain drawn over a sword for an anchor cast from a ship, and the legendary coconut shells for horses' footfalls. Not many years later, starting at around 1965, the Foley artists established their own studios[21] and the sound effects were no longer carried around in suitcases but stacked on the shelves and closets found in and around a modern sound effects studio, such as the one seen in Figure 5. A Foley room can easily contain thousands of tools for producing these effects, which are largely obtained by using commonplace objects collected over many years. In the mid-1960s when independent establishments took root, large sound postproduction facilities, such as Fono Roma, International Recording etc., continued seeing to the more delicate phases of the postproduction cycle (music recording, dubbing and ADR, mixing, producing the masters and, lastly, transcribing the mix onto film

20 Some of the information on postproduction processes and the images reproduced here have been published previously, in Meandri (2013) and in Meandri (2016a).
21 One of the first was the SES (Sound Effects Synchronization) established by Renato Marinelli and Tonino Caciuottolo.

negative) while outsourcing the creation of the entire sound effect tracks[22] to the newly created Foley companies. The latter had smaller studios that contained at least an effects room, tape recorders and a series of Moviola rooms for synchronising the sound effects. Prior to this phase, as mentioned above, Foley artists were hired as part of the sound postproduction team only for creating Foley stage sounds, but from this point on the new companies were also entrusted with other processes in sound editing, including 'special sound effects' and 'ambient sounds'. Effects such as gunshots, cars, airplanes, bombs, and so on, required field recordings or previously recorded sounds taken from a sound effects archive and an accurate synchronisation at the editing machine. These effects were given the working definition of *special sound effects*. In a similar way environmental background sounds, recorded in-the-field, (e.g. *Milan traffic*, *farm ambient, hospital ambient* or *museum ambient* etc.) were given the working definition of ambient sounds.[23] The latter generally did not require moviola synchronisation. This professional specialisation persists in current practice: still today, the work involved in constructing the sound effect track is divided between specialised Foley artists who are responsible for Foley stage sounds (the Foley artist in the strict sense of the term), and editors who are instead specialised in *ambient sounds* and *special effects*.

I have dedicated a series of publications to each sub-process briefly mentioned above: in particular, the history of International Recording (Meandri 2013), the technological setting, the production processes and the changes witnessed in processes and technologies over time (2016a), an archaeology of technique carried out through an analysis of one of the most delicate phases, i.e. optical transcription (2015), the debate concerning sound that took place in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s and the acoustics of cinema theatres (2016b) and the instruments and techniques of the Foley artists' work (Meandri, et al. 2019).

Rather than summarising my results to date, given that they have already been published, in my last paragraph I would like to work towards my conclusions, reflecting on a few crucial issues that surfaced both during my work on Hollywood composers and during my research on Italian Foley artists.

Figure 5. A present-day Foley stage (in Italian: *sala rumori*, Roma, Marinelli Effetti Sonori s.r.l.). At the centre: Foley Enzo Diliberto executing footsteps on snow.

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22   In the case, for example, of an Italian film with direct sound recording, the international track was, and is still today, created from scratch as an effect track, which later makes up, along with the music, the ME (music and effects) track, created for the purpose of dubbing the film in other languages. In the inverse process, i.e. dubbing a foreign film in Italian, it is necessary to create the so-called *integrations* for the original soundtrack, that is, redoing part of the effects track in passages where the directly recorded track is 'tarnished' by the voices in the film or where, in case a ME track is present, some effects are lacking.

23   This description of the differentiation between types of sound effects, modified here comes from Meandri (2019).

From case studies to methodological concerns (and back)

*The need for methodological eclecticism, teamwork and the insufficiency
of multi-situated participant observation*

As can be inferred from the complexity of the film production processes outlined above, it would be very difficult to engage in an ethnographic observation of the film production process as a whole: in the sound department alone, dozens of parallel processes are underway at the same time. Unless the work is carried out by a team of researchers doing fieldwork – which is plausible, but not easy to implement, at least in Italy, where not many resources are available to research – it would necessarily have to be done in a number of locations and over some years, so as to arrive at a comparison between working methods in a range of facilities and various groups of professionals. Furthermore, the locations in which film postproduction processes take shape have differing and peculiar characteristics. There are smaller facilities, such as Foley artists' studios, which were created by the professionals themselves and remain closely tied to them. Other locations are completely different, such as the large postproduction facilities, which on the one hand have a stably employed staff – including technical directors, mixers and the administrators in charge of managing them – but on the other are essentially places through which professionals temporarily pass to complete a single film. The impression one has while following a film along its path through the facility is similar to the well-known philosophical paradox of the observer who attempts to describe a battle from inside. The feeling often arises that the key creative processes take place elsewhere. But even the idea of monographically following the creation of a single film – which is theoretically plausible, because all those involved in a film know that each film is a work unto itself – does not provide a solution for this complexity. This is because it is equally true that the idiosyncratic work done on a film is not isolated and thus encounters, in any case, working procedures that level out this idiosyncrasy, relating it to a norm. One must also note that contemporary ethnographic works expressly dedicated to popular music recording studios tend to display a methodological eclecticism, thanks to which the research is very rarely limited to the studio. In the weighty volume by Elliot Bates (2016) dedicated to recording studios in Istanbul, for example, the events and the relations that take place at the same time in the IMÇ studios in Unkapanı are read through the lens of analyses covering a notable geographical area and a considerable amount of time: from the first expeditions of folklorists in rural Anatolia, to the fundamental ideological unification provided by the thought of Ziya Gökalp, a consideration of the role played by the process of Turkification of folklore Institutes (to which even Bartók and to some degree Picken turned to support their research), to the way in which the musical sources (*derleme*) were historically produced, falsified and turned into cultural heritage. This historical-critical inquiry allows Bates to propose a 'thick interpretation' of the facts observed; *studio practices* thus become a synthesis, a preferential point of observation for embedded cultural phenomena whose origins and effects lie elsewhere: an *aleph*, in Borges' sense, crossed by the many hermeneutic vanishing points of a complex universe.

Let us return to the two cases of Italian Foley artists and North American composers. The latter certainly do not belong to a guild having the same decision-making power as Italian Foley artists: in this case, the direction followed by creative decision-making power is decidedly inverted, to the detriment of the composer. Here, an aspiring composer who wishes to show off his skills and originality by writing a highly personal soundtrack almost inevitably runs into a great deal of pressure and resistance coming from the world of filmmakers, first and foremost producers and directors. As mentioned above, the latter indeed prefer to solve the problems habitually involved in the interaction between music and images with conservative means. Other types of forces also compel our composer to be conservative: for example, problems can be raised by orchestras themselves, given that they are socially complex organisms that may have a conflictual relation with the composer's creative world. Recording ten minutes of orchestral music for a film that respects the standards used in the genre and is thus 'habitual', as regards its technical and stylistic complexity, has a given cost and an expected

outcome, and thus represents a calculated risk, so to speak; recording ten minutes of orchestral music that goes beyond these standards doubles the cost and exponentially reduces the quality of the result. This puts our composer at great risk and may even not bode well for his chances to remain within the 'system'. The latter therefore has to comply with a range of expectations, in terms of stylistic features and habits, that is, in terms of language. I believe that one of the specific features of an ethnographic approach to production processes is that it is able to describe these creative processes, and this language, in terms of power, conflict and creative cooperation. The sheer number of people at work in film processes is remarkable, and a thick description of such a complex creative process, such as the one underlying a film, can certainly only be given by constantly changing the angle from which one follows and describes the same phenomenon.

The insufficiency (or under-theorisation of problematic aspects) of traditional qualitative interviews in relation to the mnemic qualities of the professionals involved

In my research experience, I have learned over time to pursue different strategies while eliciting oral accounts from informers according to their duties, because their memories are structured differently in relation to their specialisations.[24] A facility's technicians, technical directors and maintenance personnel tend to identify (or recall) a piece of equipment visually, beginning with its internal electronic components. During the interviews, for example, Alberto Sbroscia, technical director at International Recording, immediately recalled the 12AX7, 12AU7 electron valves, which along with the 12AT7 and 6X4 valves compose the electronics of mod. 351 Ampex. Scoring mixer Federico Savina, while maintaining how difficult it was to reliably identify the Ampex models located in the music control room, supported his memory with procedural details that, as became quite clear, emerge when mimicking the habitual movements used at the controls of the device: a kinetic-procedural memory, more than a visual one, was in this case what guided the identification of the device. Federico had a detailed recollection of the diverse procedures he followed while recording with the machines. On the 2-track Ampex, for example, one first had to press the play button on the transport cluster (button S505, which when pressed sets the reels in motion) and then the record buttons (S6) on the respective electronic assembly front panels, an operation done by extending the thumb and ring finger of one hand to press the buttons found 7 inches from one another; once pressed, these buttons give electric current to the bias oscillator. Comparing it with the Ampex instruction manuals, this operation clearly identifies mod. 350-2 or 351-2, whose electronics were vertically assembled above the transport section, that is, in one of the classic assemblies of a 2-track Ampex. And yet, with the 3-track devices, according to Savina, a single record button, protected by a latch, allowed all of the electronics to record at the same time. In this case, the devices were plausibly Ampex 300-3s, whose electronics could be put in record mode in two ways: using the record button S6, as above, or using the record button S804, which begins recording after pushing the play and record buttons one after another on the transport control cluster, here found to the right. Significantly, this procedure can only involve the so-called solid state models (for example, the AG 440 with transistor electronics), which introduce a Record Selector on the front of the electronics, which can be set on Ready (for the channels to record on) or Safe (for the channels not to record on) or Sel-Sync[25] (uses the recording head as a playback head). The front of the recording electronics of mod. 350 and 351 is visually identical, except for a hole located under the input switch, a feature only found on the front of mod. 351. Visually recognising the models, solely based on an archival image of the facility, is therefore not possible without the aid of oral sources. This greater tendency towards a kinetic-proce-

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24 Even though I have consulted many cases, their number is never large enough to be able to generalise these reflections, which would have to be confirmed or rejected by a broader study.

25 In the vocabulary used by Ampex, *sel-sync* is a synonym of 'Selective Synchronous'. The term *sel-sync* can also however be found in other brands of technology of the time. For further details, see Meandri (2013: 64ss.).

dural memory is shared by dubbing mixers. For example, during a meeting with Federico Savina and dubbing mixer Fausto Ancillai, when recalling the details of a notorious sequence of *C'era una volta il West* (*Once Upon a Time in the West,* 1968, Sergio Leone), Ancillai mimicked the movements of the console faders on the sequence (an audio-tactile attitude guides in this case the gradual resurfacing of a memory). Also, years later, for particularly important works tried time and again, it is not unusual for many sequences to remain 'haptically' vivid in the dubbing mixer's memory. Before the introduction of automation, the dubbing mixer's peculiarities lay in their ability to memorise the fader movements and exactly reproduce them, reel by reel, at each dubbing passage. This detail is pivotal from the methodological standpoint: conversing with a sound technician, especially a mixer or a Foley, may potentially benefit research tools designed so as to recognise and promote this mnemic quality.

The context provided by recording studios and film post-production industries therefore allows us to deploy an eclectic methodology, in which work done on oral memories can stand alongside archival research or analysis of the historical 'strata' in technological devices, whether analogical or digital. No type of source must necessarily be given priority or treated autonomously; on the contrary, different kinds of sources may cast light on one another and turn out to be complementary in order to correctly reconstruct production practices. As I have attempted to briefly illustrate in this paragraph, analysing visual documents may call up 'haptic' memories, which in turn lead to the emergence of oral memories. Again, a rudimental historical analysis that reveals a device's progressive modifications (which always indicate changes in its concrete use) can act as a trigger for oral memories which subsequently allow us to carry out 'archaeological' research more thoroughly. The intertwining that may arise out of these complementary paths is decidedly complex. Certainly, we could classify these cases among techniques in oral memory elicitation, which are well-known in ethnography – in this sense, we might mention the Colliers' work on photographs (Collier and Collier 1986). It is also clear that research based on interactions between oral, iconographic and written sources is nothing new in ethnomusicology, ethno-organology or diachronic anthropology. And yet, extending this field of research to sources whose nature varies remarkably (encompassing, for example, circuit diagrams and at times the need to do reverse engineering on circuits and on the modifications affecting the devices) would require an additional, specific theoretical-methodological reflection.

Sonic meaning as an emergent quality; again (and always) on the insufficiency
of logos and the need for comparison

The leading male actor takes a series of footsteps, highly stereotypical and, since the 1960s, with not much change over time, whose sound must be created at the same time as the noise made by his clothes, in line with a general stereotypical construction of the sonic quality of 'maleness' that varies with different film genres. Some studios gave names to these effects, for example the 'Mastroianni footstep', a type of footstep created to give sound to the footsteps of Marcello Mastroianni but later reused, still today, for many leading male actors; the *peplum* genre or the *cappa e spada* (cloak and dagger) genre had their own sonic traits; or again, the 'villain' generally has some recurring sonic features, such as leather shoes that emphasise sinister twisting noises (with a way of walking that is apparently typical of 'bad guys'). Even today, there are no female Foley artists in Italy, and therefore female characters are always interpreted by men, according to an equally stereotypical sonic encoding. The order in which the elements are put is also, from a sonic point of view, firmly hierarchical, leading to practices that have remained in the digital age: the first track is generally for the leading male actor, the second is for the female protagonist and the following tracks are reserved for secondary actors. In the field of ambient or special effects as well, the sounds are put together by reusing pre-existing materials. For example, the wind in Giuseppe Tornatore's films is generally obtained from recordings that mix winds recorded with more modern devices together with the extremely iconic winds used for Sergio Leone's films. Many more examples could be mentioned, but what I would like to highlight here is the fact that, given that only a few studios and families were (and are) responsible for the great majority of films produced in Italy, a fairly

restricted group of artists made a considerable contribution to the sonic encoding of the film and television products seen and heard by millions of people in Italy. Seen from this point of view, an ethnographic and ethnomusicological approach to professions involving film sound may become even more significant. The construction of male and female in sound, mentioned above, or the stereotypical repetition, reuse and construction of effects are guided, in the artists' intentions, by the principles of 'realism' and 'transparency'. And yet, as has been demonstrated in other studies – not necessarily ethnographically conceived, such as the work by James Lastra (2000) on sound technologies in the early years of North American film sound – any notion of realism is caught up in the medium's linguistically constructed nature, and is thus culturally determined by sound artefacts (an issue to which research in ethnomusicology or anthropology of sound has given little attention until now). The principles that guide the construction of this 'real', particularly in Italian cinema, include a marked tendency towards hyperacusis: 'the world resounds', in Foley artists' creations, much more intensely than in films with direct sound recording[26] (which, naturally, also have a constructed nature, based, however, on different aesthetic and linguistic principles). The 'world resounds', furthermore, by condensing something more than the real into sound, that is, 'a will that is announced in sound'.[27] A sound effect, such as an explosion, can be assembled from many different effects layered on top of one another, including animal sounds, roars, etc. The prototype for this semantic thickening is perhaps Tarzan's cry, whose patent was the object of a long dispute, since the sound technicians at MGM Studios altered Weissmuller's voice, adding a series of animal sounds and turning this effect, as is often the case, into an *unheimlich*, perturbing object. Even the most apparently neutral effect, however, has always been subjected to a more or less deep process of layering. I once witnessed work being done on a TV series in which sound had to be added to a scene with a daughter visiting her father in an intensive care unit. The young sound technician entrusted with the ambient sounds had indeed used an intensive care unit hospital ambient – a classic 'hospital air'.[28] A Foley with more expertise later corrected his work, reminding him that for dramatic purposes, the sound had to be more intimate: the 'realistic' ambient, treated by the young technician as if it were a medical drama, had to be replaced with an ambient sound more focused on the characters' inner feelings: the intensive care ward had to seem like a suspended place with an almost religious silence, in which the *air* had to contribute to the psychological portrayal of the two characters, who met on the border between life and death. The expert Foley instinctively selected, after searching among the materials in the archive, a series of *museum-airs*, and recreated the scene with the ambient air from a natural science museum. One can never take for granted, therefore, an exact correspondence between a sound effect and a setting, and every aesthetic choice can be given a thick description that is always culturally pertinent.

Taking another glance at the anecdote quoted above regarding *L'Eclisse*, or, again, the episode just mentioned involving *museum air*, what we are dealing with are cases in which, either through qualitative interviews or through participant observation, it is possible to bring a semantics to light, a semantics that is, however, an emergent, non-autonomous quality of the sound materials used. In most cases 'textual' analysis alone cannot fully reveal the logic underlying audiovisual composition, nor is participant observation always able to grasp the subtle reasoning behind a choice in editing, above all when everything is going smoothly – that is in the vast majority of cases where explicit verbalisations between Foley artists as to the best solution to be adopted do not take place. Certainly, I can ask the Foley artist why, at

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26 This intensity in creating the effects track, as it emerges from the work of the Foley artists, is often balanced with the dubbing. Sounds must be created with a certain intensity in order to resist, so to speak, the gate keeping of the dubbing; this is one of the reasons why the Foley artist's track comes across as 'hyperacoustic', and with high volume. And yet, this technical note does not entirely explain the aesthetic choices made in practice: a sort of local and secular 'animism' survives in Foley artists' work, which at times is illuminated by beliefs, which are quite difficult to comprehend, as to the nature and expressiveness of sounds.

27 I have taken this expression, knowingly altering it, from Piana (1991:87). The original phrase is: «Hearing does not therefore come to a stop with sound, but lets go its grasp on it so as to activate the functions that immediately reach out to grasp the thing that is announced in the sound» (my translation).

28 *Aria* is a general term (also used in the recording industry, but with a different meaning) that for Foley artists indicates, in internal settings, the recording of a setting that brings out its ambience, reverberation, reflections and spatiality.

the moment when a scene shows the walls of a castle, the sound of crows has been inserted. If the researcher is lucky, he/she will receive an explicit answer, i.e. this is always done, to suggest a presence high in the air and increase the depth of field of the scene. If a detailed audiovisual analysis is able to collect a number of similar scenes, taken from a rather large filmography, by analysing a seemingly secondary material one can note that, quite often, ravens and crows are heard when a castle is shown. Thus, some constant elements do exist in the *decoupage* and also in the treatment of sound and can be investigated through a mixed method: participant observation, analysis of textual recurrences and qualitative interviews. Questions on more specific aspects, however, may not receive an answer – as is well known by anyone who has done research with traditional musicians – or may come up against statements that are *per se* perfectly coherent, such as 'that's how we do things because that's how things are done' or 'because that's how they've always been done', but which only partially meet our need for a 'thick' and truly dialogical description. Most of the choices made by Foley artists, at least within my experience in research on film sound, are too elusive to be given a shared interpretation, insofar as we do not have an ethno-theory that explicitly clarifies the reason underlying an aesthetic choice. Of course, the lack of a verbalised theory does not prevent these practices from constructing *discursivity* in a different way, or, as mentioned above, from having emergent features. If however – as has been suggested by Steven Feld (1982) – one must find the system of metaphors that, if correctly interpreted, allows an ethno-theory to emerge, even if this theory is not formalised, then either my research experience failed to identify these metaphors or, as I believe, these metaphors exist, in the case of Foley artists, but on a tactile and not entirely verbal level. There is, in other words, a quality in the way of touching the things of the world to make them re-sound, an ethics of the gesture, which can be clearly observed but cannot easily be translated into words. This is no doubt a system that can be taught, and that is taught through *exempla*, through the pragmatic, physical work done on the Foley stage (this transmission of knowledge is, moreover, difficult to document, because the time-span in which new Foley artists are recruited and trained in Italy, is very slow; over the decade in which I carried out my research, for example, no new Foley artist was trained in the studios in which I was present).

I understand that this inability to bring out what is implicit in a gesture (or in a 'motor impulse', in Sachs' terms) replicates a limit that many other researchers have historically come up against, whether dealing with music or sound. The problem that continues to arise, in other words, involves the *imponderables of real life* (Malinovski), the irreducible (or multiple) nature of the musical sign (Jankélévitch), or the sonic sign in our case. Again, the problem involves cultural constructions that, by resisting the obsessive chain of symbolic substitutions, are structurally opposed to the properties of *logos* (Connerton 1999) and that introduce the risk of discursively and cognitively formulating a question that cannot be answered in the same terms.

When Andrej Tarkovskij worked in Italy on one of his films, *Nostalghia* (1983), the Foley artists at the Anzellotti studio were faced with methods completely different from the ones to which they were accustomed when working with Italian directors. Tarkovskij gave his personal attention to the creation of the sound effects track. Like some other well-known directors – in Italy, one must certainly mention Sergio Leone – Tarkovskij knew very well how to interact with Foleys, showing knowledge of and respect for their practices, and thus did not make impossible demands that would have been categorically refused, as happened with *L'Eclisse*. He did however dedicate a great deal of effort to obtaining highly detailed effects, within a consolidated practice: he introduced notable variations in the footsteps, diversifying them according to the dramatic moment and the character in question and thus working against a stereotypical rendering; furthermore, he gave much thought to the characters' bodily presence, some ambient effects and the choice of *airs*. Massimo Anzellotti recalls, for example, the enormous amount of water effects used for the sequences with torrential rain. Here, the sound explores the various qualities of pouring rain that, in normal practice, would have probably been given a single ambient effect, or a layered effect that was in any case invariable. In Tarkovskij's approach, instead, sound explores the matter of which the world is made, along with the images; it seems to be engaged in listening to the world's appearance, both

material and aural. This stylistic orientation is perfectly in line with the dramaturgy shaped by sound in Tarkovskij's films. With his extremely refined and well-known conception of the world of sound found in his movies, he may seem to represent an extreme case, but that is exactly the point. In my research experience, I have repeatedly heard stories and anecdotes about the different ways in which directors conceive the sonic world, particularly when the filmmaker in question comes from a different cultural milieu (without the director necessarily being a 'foreigner', as is shown by the case of Antonioni).

What I would like to emphasise is that coming into contact with different practices or extreme cases, whether accepted (Tarkovskij, Pasolini) or rejected (Antonioni) by the system, brings out, by contrast, specific features that may go unnoticed by participant observation or historical-critical reconstruction. One of the paths that must certainly be explored in order to better describe sound effect practices involves a comparison between different production systems. One excellent question we could ask ourselves as researchers, for example, is whether the construction of maleness or femaleness is the same when done by Foley artists in Italy, or in e.g. the United States, Tokyo, Bombay, France or Nigeria. No useful comparative data is available, since this type of research has not yet been attempted to my current knowledge. Analysing sound effect practices may represent an excellent field for transcultural enquiry, within which a careful revival of comparativism would be plausible, and perhaps even desirable.

Is the Studio really relevant?

I am not entirely convinced that the notion of the 'recording studio' is pertinent to the area of research I have attempted to outline. Recording in a studio is no doubt an important part of the process covering all that is involved in the film composer's or the Foley artist's work, but in both cases it is not the only one and, perhaps, in the interpreters' opinion, not even the most important. For a film composer, the process begins with the *spotting session*, the first meeting between the filmmakers and the musician, also involving a series of professional figures who assist the composer, most importantly the music editor, who is the one who ensures continuity throughout the entire process. Generally, the editor has already played a part in the process that leads to the soundtrack, well before the composer. The editor is, for example, often in charge of *temp tracking*,[29] an operation that may even begin during production, while screening the dailies,[30] and that consists in preparing a temporary soundtrack, to be able to evaluate the film, and the initial *rough cuts*[31] with music. All of these operations, including the highly complex phase that precedes the recording session – from composition to preparing *mockups* for the audit of the cues that will have to be recorded – take place outside of a true recording studio. Sometimes the composer's or the orchestrator's *atelier* resemble one, and are no doubt studios in their own right, but they are not actual recording studios. The recording session itself is generally held in specialised facilities intended for orchestral recording, which are quite different, in their volume of space and the technologies used, from pop re-

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29 This operation consists in preparing a series of temporary cues that allow the film, or parts of it, to be screened with music. This practice, to which composers sometimes object, is required by a number of factors: the first is the need often felt by directors and editors to evaluate how effective a scene is with a given piece of music, even though the latter is temporary; the second concerns the filmmakers' desire to control the general mood of the soundtrack: by using the temp track, the director, helped by a specialist (often the music editor) creates, through trial and error, a temporary soundtrack entirely made up of pre-existing materials, with which the filmmaker has complete control over the semantic restructuring introduced by the music. The spotting, i.e. the phase of the film's screening with the composer in order to decide on the general characteristics of the soundtrack, is now increasingly substituted or at least downscaled by the temp tracking; this strongly limits the composer's creative autonomy, which in turn leads to the disapproval towards this practice sometimes expressed by composers.

30 The unedited shots are generally screened by the director, or the filmmakers, sometimes along with the actors and creative collaborators involved in directing, the day following the shooting, in order to be evaluated.

31 These refer to the first phase of a film's editing in which a 'roughly' edited version of the film is created. Generally, in the analogue era, the composer's work began strictly with the so-called *locked picture*, a phase in which the editing is considered definitive and acts as a reference point for all departments. This concept has become more indefinite in the digital era, given that digital technology allows the film to be kept open until the last phases, which leads to greater fluidity in the entire process; this does not always ease the composer's task, since they are sometimes forced to endlessly rewrite the music for sequences in which the editing changes continuously.

cording studios. The musical premixes are often made at the facility where the recording took place – a phase currently referred to as *mixing and sweetening* – but the recorded stems, whose mixing is usually left open precisely to allow further manipulation to be done, then pass to the dubbing, which from the point of view of the film's overall mixing operations is certainly more important than the music premixes, in which the composer as a rule does not participate and which are not carried out in a recording studio – North-American practice describes this operation, properly speaking, as a *re-recording*, with a nuance that, with respect to simple recording, highlights the passage from 'recorded' material to 'recorded' material.

It is not only a matter of nominalism. Foley artists, for example, operate in rooms that are, to all intents and purposes, recording studios. Nevertheless, my fieldwork suggests that in the minds of Foleys, precedence goes not to the reproductive/recording aspects but to a performative act, which certainly is recorded but presents a few significant differences compared to a musical performance in a studio. Consistent portions of the process involved in sound effect, furthermore, take place outdoors (direct recording on the set, or the creation of new ambient sounds and special effects in the field). Recording outdoors calls for a set of skills, a sensitivity and an experience that are not comparable to those required in a recording studio. A considerable part of the work, as is the case for film postproduction in general, actually consists in re-recordings that are carried out at the DAW (digital audio workstation, and previously in the transcription room or the editing room) and have little in common with a recording studio. As regards special effects and ambient sounds as well, in the minds of Foley artists, defining them as recordings would be inaccurate. In this case as well, the fact that they are recordings remains in the background compared to ideas concerning how to work with and give shape to previously recorded effects: working *on* sound and *with* sound, the act of *modelling* it and *designing* it over the timeline, seems to me more important in this case than the act of recording or copy/transcribing, which nonetheless lies at the origin of this act of modelling sound.[32] Sound and music postproduction as a whole therefore involves a series of parallel processes. Ethnographically observing them cannot entirely fall under the label of an 'ethnography of recording studios'.

There are no simple solutions to this dilemma. Replacing this label with 'ethnography of film sound and film music production and postproduction processes' would be plausible, but every different media process would consequently require a specific label and a particular specialisation. In the same way as placing sound and music postproduction processes under the wider category of media ethnographies would deprive these creative-musical processes of a substratum that brings them together and is specifically their own, to the detriment of the heuristic effectiveness of the label, which is in any case important in identifying the general phenomenon. If, furthermore, we were to consider all the processes that take place in a recording studio during a film's sound and music postproduction as being brought together by their belonging to the pool of mediatised and reproduced music, the aporias we would come up against are even more radical. As has been rightly maintained by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, extending the theses of the school of Chicago, '*all* mediation is remediation' (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 55). In so doing, they have implicitly abolished the concept of 'mediation'. If we interpret this assumption from an ethnomusicological perspective, remediation becomes an implied process in the selection and use of a sound source, as much as in the construction of a musical instrument; both are expressions of a remediation in that they are derived from a selection of culturally pertinent traits that are referred to a given sound practice, within a chain of uninterrupted remediations. Bolter and Grusin indeed defined remediation both as 'inseparability of mediation and reality' and as 'a process of reforming

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32 Unquestionably, in studios where popular music is produced as well, the work done on editing, a process of giving shape which follows the recording operations, is every bit as important, and the weight given to the two procedures varies according to the genre of music. It is however equally true that, particularly with some genres, the so-called tracking is, also from an ideological point of view, constructed and conceived in a way that gives foundation to and guides the work of artists and sound engineers – and is moreover accompanied by the huge iconography involving in creating its fame – while this same ideological framework is less effective in cases of film postproduction in which re-recording is used or previously recorded sound effects are edited and moulded.

reality' (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 55-56). Let us consider two paradigmatic examples of this process of 'reforming reality', taken from both areas discussed here: 1) the case of a Foley artist who selects an instrument or invents a technique suited to producing a new effect. This selection rests on an evaluation of its 'phonogenic' quality, understood as the quality of the sound produced by the instrument *once recorded*: many techniques were conceived and modelled according to the capabilities of the microphone and the process of transduction, selecting techniques and objects that came across as more phonogenic than others for the task at hand; 2) producing mock-ups, mainly intended to obtain the filmmakers' approval for a given cue, forces the composer to use a very small part of the vast array of performance techniques and means of expression available to orchestras, giving greater weight, that is, to that which can be adequately simulated by the set of virtual instruments that make up their technical-creative atelier.[33] Quite commonly, one hears statements by composers concerning the fact that sampling is changing the film composer's ear: the sampled orchestra as a remediating filter (and, even before this, an orchestra remediated through transduction and mixing technologies) shapes the perception of the orchestra as an acoustic medium, definitively changing its colour or in any case requiring us to call upon the illusory categories of *sound quality* and *reality* within the area of remediations, in which they have always been caught up. As is well known in ethnomusicology, the entire culture of acoustic media, beginning with wax cylinder phonograph recordings, has reformed the acoustic reality of the world – as has, truth be told, every sound medium, even before the arrival of sound reproduction technologies. In short, and returning to the thesis of Bolter and Grusin, transparency as 'immediacy' and opacity as 'hypermediacy' are found in a continuum which varies with the changing conditions of perception. Perception clearly encompasses the experience of remediated sounds through recording and reproduction technologies (old tape microphones conceived in the 1930s as mere transducers – reflecting the value of *transparency* – are today appreciated for their qualities as filters – reflecting the value of *opacity*). This confirms the cultural character of sensorial perception and its remediations. Sensorial experience does not prefigure media – which would be impossible *a priori* – but emerges and takes place with them, as brilliantly argued also by André Leroi-Gourhan (1993) with his concept of 'ethnicization of cultures'. From this perspective, adopting the definition of a specific field, such as 'ethnography of recording studios' – or similar definitions that give aetiological precedence to one striking but historically situated moment of a complex chain of remediation – is neither free from aporias nor from ethnocentric projections.

We can rest assured that the *veil of time*, to take up Carlo Ginzburg's expression, will allow these issues to become more clearly unveiled and that ethnomusicological thought will continue to engage with this splendid illusion.

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33   On this, see Sapiro (2016), especially Chapter 4.

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