
LADA – L'Arte dell'Ascolto (The Art of Listening)

A Festival in Rimini, Italy, 1991–98

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*LADA – L'Arte dell'Ascolto (The Art of Listening)*¹ was an independent international festival dedicated to radio and art held in Rimini, Italy from 1991 to 1998, curated by Roberto Paci Dalò with the collaboration of Isabella Bordoni, produced by the artist group Giardini Pensili with varying collaborators and coproducers. LADA was a project in continuous evolution to reaffirm a creative approach to radio, conceived of as a place and a medium aggregating to other languages. An explorative relationship with municipal and public spaces emerged as a second characteristic of the festival.

LADA included radio works, concerts, live radio drama, performances, films and videos, installations, debates, and radio broadcasts (on the Italian and Austrian National Radio, RAI and ORF respectively, and other stations) and, in 1995, saw the launching of RADIO LADA as one of the first online radios. Every annual version of the festival was achieved with minimal economic resources, and it was all possible thanks to the collaboration of artists, scholars, and technicians participating with sincere enthusiasm and collaborative spirit.

Considering radio's situation in Italy today, having a strong audience but being dramatically diminished in terms of planning and production, I view our small

L'Arte dell'Ascolto festival in Rimini and other experiences—such as the continuous production, distribution, and reflection of radio art on and by the *Audiobox* program on RAI (Italian National Radio) and its large international festivals of the same name—as somewhat the swan song of an age.

Today, *Audiobox* is no more, and the RAI regional radio headquarters are almost all sadly underutilized, with many of the extraordinary engineers and technicians that collaborated on the L'Arte dell'Ascolto festival now finding themselves «recycled» in the area of television, not having enough radio space in which to operate.

What follows is a short description of the respective annual L'Arte dell'Ascolto (LADA) festivals.

1991: Radio e Audio Art (Radio and Audio Art)

The first time the festival L'Arte dell'Ascolto was held, it took place entirely in the Cineteca in Rimini, an evocative place with Roman mosaics on the walls, located inside the Gambalunga Library building, one of the most important humanities libraries in Italy. Among the many authors represented in the library with original works is Athanasius Kircher (a protagonist of acoustic imagination).

The following is excerpted from the text presenting the first annual LADA festival:

Contemporary radio work brings together and synthesizes different styles and trends including: present-day musical research, implementation of technology, a growing attention to everyday sounds, that is, sounds considered to lack «musical» value, and acoustic ecology or the relationship between human beings and the sound landscapes in which they live. Radio art, or hoerspiel, comprise all of these facets, facilitating a form of acoustic art, achieved specifically for radio, in which texts of any type—literary or poetic—are transported to an acoustic context, thus acquiring new meanings and relationships: sound that emphasizes silence and the awareness of our acoustic environment. Radio art can be considered to be a developmental process, starting from the few illustrative environmental noises in early radio drama and culminating in complex works of sound that, not coincidentally, have brought

composers and sound artists closer to radio, resulting in the realization of an increasing number of compositions conceived for this medium. Their exploration of radio's intimacy and sense of community tends, even while maintaining a special position for music, to dissolve into and integrate with other media such as the visual arts, video, theater, performance, and film.

A section of the first L'Arte dell'Ascolto festival was dedicated to the multi-coded *Audiobox* space—then a daily program on RAI Uno—emphasizing the production, presentation, and reflection of radio-specific work by artists and embedding it into in-depth information on cultural events and developments in Italy and abroad.

LADA 91 also saw the launch of the series *Audioritratto* (Audio Self-Portrait). The first of these tributes was dedicated to the Australian composer/performer Jon Rose in whose work radio to this day plays an important role. In the following years, Audio Self-Portraits of Luc Ferrari, Mauricio Kagel, and Heiner Goebbels were produced with an emphasis on their radio work.

All variants of the yearly LADA festivals were accompanied by presentations of international radio art productions, networked projects, and CD productions.

1992: Guerre (Wars)

The 1992 festival was witness to the Yugoslavian paradox. In this period—and during the first left-centre government in the history of the Italian Republic—air raids departed from the Cervia airport (twenty minutes from Rimini) to perform their missions over Belgrade. Now war, thought to be exorcised from Europe, was right in our own home. That this war was the responsibility of the European governments, with active involvement of the Italian government, made it even more tangible.

The festival of 1992—along with many other events—featured radio works by Arsenije Jovanović of Belgrade, already established as an important protagonist in the development of radio-specific aesthetics of «composition» (in a radio art rather than a musical sense) using sounds from his very own, ever-growing archives. Implementing the first site-specific work at LADA, Spanish composer and musician Llorenç Barber realized *Dal sole al sole*, a concerto for one hundred

bells (and a single performer, Barber himself). His concerto took place non-stop from sunset to dawn, inland from Rimini on the almost dry riverbed of the Marecchia River. What seemed to be an event for the few was transformed into an event of unexpected proportions, with an audience of several hundred people who spent the night in this place among bushes, shrubs, stones, and bonfires.

Canadian artist Robert Adrian X and Austrian Gerfried Stocker presented their three-year project *ZERO—The Art of Being Everywhere*, which they had been curating at the time in Graz, Austria. *ZERO* included *The Big Net Jam—an interactive online opera* by Seppo Gründler, a musician-composer, radio artist, and innovative programmer from Graz. *The Big Net Jam* took place on FidoNet, used MIDI language, and was usable by whomever had access to a computer and modem. The MIDI data could be uploaded by telephone, played on a synthesizer, manipulated, altered, and retransmitted on the online database for further manipulation by other participants. Over the course of two days, the L'Arte dell'Ascolto audience could participate in *The Big Net Jam* through interactive hookups with an interactive installation located in front of the Austrian pavilion at the World Expo in Seville, Spain.

1993: L'Infanzia del Linguaggio (The Infancy of Language)

1993 proved to be a crucial year for L'Arte dell'Ascolto. The need was felt for a different and more radial use of space, and thus we began to work in and for the city. In the 1993 festival, projects were created that allowed for a sense of distance and/or nearness. A psychogeography was triggered that sought to challenge the routine of canonic spaces.

The inauguration of LADA 93 took place outdoors at the Piazza Cavour in the historical centre of the city, with Italian sound ecologist and composer Albert Mayr performing «Time Events.»

For the first time, the festival had access to the *Publiphono*. The loudspeakers of this special «radio» were stationed over a length of fifteen kilometers of coastline, at a distance of approximately fifty meters apart. *Publiphono* was created by Renato de Donato in 1946. *Publiphono* president Ugo de Donato explained in 1993: «During the golden years of mass tourism with its unprecedented growth, in August we would sometimes broadcast an average of 150 messages a day, what

with lost children and children found. We were the classic beach for families.» *Publiphono* remains part of the acoustic memory of at least four generations of beachgoers on the Adriatic Riviera.

Twelve artists received commissions to create original works for the festival's *Publiphono* broadcasts, transmitted first on Rimini's beach and subsequently by European radio networks. The *Publiphono* broadcasts took place on two days in August at 4:00 p.m. and lasted thirty minutes each. The very first broadcast even set off a small measure of panic, with *Publiphono*'s switchboard having been invaded by telephone calls from people alarmed by the «strange sounds» emitted. That same year, *La lunga notte* (The Long Night) was created, an internationally networked concert between Rimini, Innsbruck, Cologne, and Jerusalem, with participation in Rimini by Takumi Fukushima (violin), Gordon Monahan (piano), Horst Hörtnner (interactive computer system), Giancarlo Cardini (piano), Quartetto Arianna (string quartet), Claudio Jacomucci (accordion), Roberto Paci Dalò (clarinet, voice, live electronics), Gerfried Stocker (data gloves, interactive computer system), and, live from Innsbruck's regional radio station, Sainkho Namtchylak (voice), from Jerusalem's KOL Israel studios the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai and the Palestinian poet Samih Al-Qasim, as well as from Cologne Axel Otto at the Electronic Café International. The live radio line from Jerusalem did not work and was replaced by a telephone connection.

«Of course the signal was not pure but whatever the loss from a technical point of view, it makes this piece particularly touching. We can <feel> the distance. We can feel the desert.»²

1994: La Casa (The House)

The fourth annual L'Arte dell'Ascolto was a reflection on the house as a private place, with its ephemeral, vulnerable separations between inside and outside: a reflection on the sounds of the home, but also on the acoustic imagination of a private space; on the various daytime and nighttime moods of the house; on the occupied home, the bombed home, the desired home; as well as on houses, their invisible walls and acoustic crossings from floor to floor.

Among the radio stations participating were the Russian, Slovenian, and Polish radios, a further broadening of the scope that reflected the event's philoso-

phy.

Live concerts and performances strictly linked to the radio medium were presented, among them Stefano Giannotti's *Canzoni Naturali* (Natural Songs) and Sergio Messina's *RadioGladio*.³

The section *Radio pour les yeux* (Radio for the eyes) opened to the image in movement with videos by Konstanze Binder and the German intermedia artist Wolf Kahlen, who founded the twenty-four-hour artists' radio *Ruine der Künste* Berlin (Ruins of the Arts, 1988–1994).

Again, works by international artists were commissioned for *Publiphono*, which also broadcast some of the *Messages to Belgrade*, an Austrian project in which international artists created messages to the independent radio station B92 in Belgrade.

**1995: Radio Lada, Horizontal Radio, Arte a Parte
(Radio Lada, Horizontal Radio, Art Aside)**

«Consequently, what is necessary is not the recovery of the ear as a privileged orifice for the nostalgic return of oral culture, but the growth of new ears—digital ears—as a sign of nostalgia for the future.»⁴

Five years before the end of the millennium—five years during which, due to digital technologies, radical changes in daily life, in education, in art would occur—LADA became border-crossing: its program was distributed across the border from Italy to the small Republic of San Marino.

The festival aimed to constitute an instance for reflection and discussion premised on the project *Horizontal Radio*, which had been realized on June 22 and 23 of the same year, with the participation of artists, technicians, and many others around the world. Within its Mediterranean sub-network (Italy, Spain, Israel, Palestine, Greece, San Marino), three Italian National Radio (RAI) channels along with several independent radios had contributed eight hours of live broadcasting and several on-site events at various locations in different cities, among them Bologna. LADA 95 was intended to pursue a debate on art and artistic work faced with new technologies and the changes in perception they provoked.

Concise introductions were dedicated to how CD-ROMs, digital radio, Internet, hypertexts—among other things—function and how they might be utilized

at the same time in artistic and scientific contexts.

During the festival, *Radio LADA*, a web radio, was launched. This ensured that festival events created between Rimini and San Marino could potentially be listened to throughout the world and be picked up by radio stations.

A main conference was held between Rimini and San Marino with the participation of international artists and theoreticians.

The future headquarters for Rimini's museums became the evocative space for *Arte a parte* (Art Aside): a modernist building that had been closed for many years, it was used in its entirety in order to give each artist ample space for his or her installation. Some of the installations were site-specific, but all of them were based on the relationship between sound and space. Light played a fundamental role in the exhibition.

In San Marino, exhibits were created in a private home and at the Pinacoteca Museo di San Francesco. All festival events were facilitated in collaboration with San Marino RTV (San Marino National Radio).

Some of the works were spread out over the open-air market that is held twice weekly, filling various piazzas in the historical centre of Rimini. There, among clothes, food, and objects, the sounds of the audio and radio works of the festival moved in an almost subliminal way, superimposing themselves on the soundscape of the market's sites.

Also, a live radio broadcast was transmitted on RAI's Radiotre *Audiobox* and on the Internet.

1996: Circuiti del Desiderio (Circuits of Desire)

Bodies? Partial machines. The 1996 festival revolved around the body and the senses. At the centre of the project was the conference *Partial Body*, implying the body understood as partial machine. This comprised an investigation of the possible forms of relationships between the body and technology, of the conventions and codes sanctioning the territory of standards and normality. Underscoring the necessity of practical theory and a laboratory, the conference *Partial Body: Conference vs. Laboratory* was held in three different moments at Smoke, a coffee bar in Rimini close to the beach, and at the SUMS Citizens' Club in San Marino.

The festival became increasingly aware of the spaces used for its projects and

events. Places as «found objects» turned into extraordinary spaces the moment in which they were experienced in other contexts.

Again, works by international artists were broadcast through *Publiphono*, over the sandy beaches of the Riviera. Video and interactive installations were located at a Palazzo in Rimini and a church in San Marino, while the coffee bar Smoke in Rimini featured photographic work. Live performances took place in different locations, among them a theater and a club, broadcast on channels of several national radios and on commercial regional stations: RAI (*Audiobox*), San Marino RTV, ORF (*Kunstradio*), Radio Mediterraneo, and Radio Melody.

1997: Misure (Measures)

The 1997 festival was dedicated to noises and silences in networks, the measuring of time and space; to a phantasmagoric encounter between archaic and contemporary things; and to reflections on the relationship between pop culture and «high» culture, between Internet and radio, between political and aesthetic reflection, between the North and the South in the world.

The festival was centred at the Palace for Tourism, a small, late-nineteenth-century building located in front of the legendary Grand Hotel, an icon of the films of Federico Fellini. This unusual partnership network brought together radio stations, independent associations, discotheques, and government agencies. The German playwright Heiner Müller was the guiding figure of the entire festival and the subject of an international symposium entitled Heiner Müller, Radio, Digital Technologies.

The section *HeinerMüllerMaterial* comprised two events: the first was *Dance Floor: HeinerMüllerMaterial (Uno)* with Sam Auinger, Rupert Huber, Roberto Paci Dalò, Norbert Math, Davide Riondino, Isabella Bordoni, and Rachel de Boer (VJ), with live performances broadcast on the radio on *Suoni e Ultrasuoni* RAI RadioDue; the second was *HeinerMüllerMaterial (Due)* with Rita Maffei, Fabiano Fantini, Antonio Catania, and E Zezi live on RAI Radiotre *Audiobox*.

In collaboration with the Communications Science course «Media Dramaturgy: Radio & Internet» at the University of Siena, the main project for the network involved a laboratory for the creation of the online radio *Itaca* (which actually never started).

The first collaboration of LADA with the oldest Italian labor union, the CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* [General Italian Labor Confederation], created in 1906), and with the association of solidarity, Hammada, resulted in an explicitly political project. The Gruppo Operaio di Pomigliano d'Arco E Zezi presented a concert of solidarity with the Saharawi people in the Western Sahara.

In an autumn version, *Publiphono* became a live event on a Sunday morning with the beach populated not by tourists, as during the high season, but by the natives out taking a walk, as is typical during Sunday off-season mornings. Austrian sound and radio artist Sam Auinger executed a two-hour live concert using the fifteen kilometers of amplification.

As part of the festival, the third section of the ORF *Kunstradio* project *Recycling the Future I–IV* was achieved with live broadcasts on Österreich 1 and the *Kunstradio* website. The LADA festival thus became part of *Kunstradio*'s preparations for the celebration of its tenth anniversary with the «on line – on air – on site» *Recycling the Future IV* festival in Vienna in December 1997.⁵

LADA also saw the first experiment of an «instant documentary» at the festival by Salvo Cuccia. Filmed and edited in real time, it was shown at the festival's conclusion and embodied an example of artistic practice strongly linked to the development of digital work.

1998: Ascoltare il Mediterraneo (Listening to the Mediterranean)

The last time the festival was held, the need for a dialectic encounter between the cultures of the Internet and a special tradition became evident—a tradition conceived of in an innovative manner that finds an explicit place of action in a well-defined geographic area: the Mediterranean.

The leading figure and inspiration of the festival was the writer and linguist Predrag Matvejević, who was born in Mostar (Bosnia-Herzegovina, ex-Yugoslavia) and emigrated to become an Italian citizen. Matvejević's writings and complex notions on the *Mediterranean* and *World Ex*, his memento to the the «wound» of Sarajevo, and the destruction of the famous old bridge in Mostar were the focus of LADA 98.

The central event of the festival was the performance of *Mondo Ex* in which

Predrag Matvejević read from his texts to a flux of live streams from different ex-Yugoslavian cities. The preparatory work took several months since it involved putting back into contact people and places who had been dispersed by the war. The reestablishment of these contacts resulted in the forming of a strange, paradoxical (and moving) *Yugoslav Electronics Federation* that was created in the space and for the duration of one night. Along with Matvejević, the musicians Luigi Lai (one of the great heirs of the Sardinian tradition and maestro of *is launeddas*), Lullo Mosso, and Massimo Semprini performed on-site in Rimini.

The entire festival was transmitted through live streams on the Internet, and a workshop and mix of presentations was achieved under the guidance of *Itaca & Aria Network*, a Euro-Mediterranean radio and telematics project involving Barcelona, Lisbon, Marseille, Rimini, and Vienna.

Diaries occupied an important place within this festival thanks to the presence of Elena Tosi Brandi (written diary) and Stefano Ricci (drawn diary), to which were added the animation films of Gianluigi Toccafondo.

In addition to *Mondo Ex*, other performances, almost all linked to the writings of Matvejević, were presented: *Reading from a Mediterranean Breviary* with Nicoletta Fabbri and Pierpaolo Paolizzi; *Maqam* live sounds from the Mediterranean, dance floor between electronic and traditional; *Mediterraneo* with Predrag Matvejević, and webcasting from various cities; *Audiobox on-line*, webcasting with the participation of Pinotto Fava, Pino Saulo, the artists in Rimini, and hookups to artists in many other places via the Internet.

A Conclusion, A Departure

Aside from conveying my personal reflections on this adventure, it has been my aim in this essay to furnish information on participants, places, and works, so as to create a kind of Polaroid of a project such as this, with its fragile, volatile, and broad nature. I have attempted to give an overall vision of something that by its very nature was inevitably multiple, collective, rhizomatic.

LADA also witnessed the birth of the fertile relationship between radio and the Internet. The festival was the direct eyewitness of a special period during which Internet became accessible. Everything that is «obvious» today (streaming, uploading, or downloading something) was at the time—just a few years ago, really!—a genuine adventure.

Projects like *Horizontal Radio* can no longer exist, not so much due to technology issues—since now everything is available practically right in your own home—but rather to the changes in people, in the institutions, and in the public radio organizations. The personal and institutional conditions no longer exist, in short, in which to create projects on this scale. Whether this will prove beneficial or detrimental is not up to us to decide. All we can do is take note of the present state of affairs and never stop erecting active «coming communities.»

Increasingly, I believe that, for the developments of these processes, it is crucial to set up activities on a daily basis, also in relation to specific physical locations. For this reason, we initiated the Velvet Factory project in 2006:⁶ an unusual contemporary arts centre created within the Velvet Club, a venue well-known across Europe for its electronic, rock, and quality pop music programming. Located in the hills near Rimini, it is a three-story building—approximately 2,500 square meters—facing a lake, averaging more than 180,000 visitors annually. The Factory has post-production facilities, several different spatial typologies, and artist-in-residence programs, where people can gather to establish further collaborative strategies both on local and international scales. An open laboratory for sensorial adventures focuses on digital cultures, urban explorations, sound, image, and radio—a project devoted to the development of the Cultural District and the Creative City, where we try to continue the experiences of LADA daily, locally, and internationally. This is the future for me and, as always, there is so much to do!

1 This essay was translated from the Italian by Suzanne Branciforte. A complete report about LADA – L'Arte dell'Ascolto is downloadable from <http://giardini.sm/lada>.

2 Isabella Bordoni and Roberto Paci Dalò in a presentation of their work in the symposium/exhibition ZEITGLEICH (1994). See also exh. cat. *Zeitgleich* (Vienna: Triton, 1994), p. 111. Or see <http://www.kunstradio.at/TAKE/zgcatalog.html>.

3 See Sergio Messina's contribution, «Airtime,» in this volume.

4 Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *Lecture* (Rimini and San Marino, 1995).

5 Episodes 1 and 2 of *Recycling the Future* took place in the *Hybrid WorkSpace* at documenta X in Kassel and at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz. See <http://kunstradio.at/FUTURE/index.html>.

6 See *Velvet Factory* at <http://velvet.it>.