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The Death of Paper: A Radio Play

DENIS HOLLIER

Translated by Alyson Waters

1. Berlin, May 10, 1933: Autos-da-fé

While writing his *Memoirs*, Raymond Aron was led to reread the series of “Letters from Germany” he had written for various French magazines (among them Alain’s *Libres propos* and Guéhenno’s *Europe*) between 1931 and 1933 when, after finishing his studies, he had gone to Germany to teach. Aron was especially attentive to what these letters had to say since the fiftieth anniversary of the events he had described in them had brought them back into the limelight, where they received not entirely favorable response. The last letter in particular, which had appeared in September 1933 and in which he described the changes that had occurred in Germany following Hitler’s rise to power, received especially harsh criticism. In it, Aron spoke (or didn’t speak, as his critics pointed out) of the legendary book burnings of the night of May 10.

Aron was in Berlin at the time and had gone to the site with Golo Mann. Fifty years later, historians had difficulty acknowledging that a witness of those now-legendary book burnings—a witness who, as a Frenchman, a Jew, and a leftist intellectual at the time, should have felt personally threatened by their implications—didn’t find them worthy of more than an allusion. “Allusion” is in fact the word Aron used in his *Memoirs*: “I made an allusion to the flames into which Goebbels threw or had students throw the condemned books, without describing the scene.”¹

And it is indeed an allusion Aron makes. In the middle of a list of the afflictions that accompany the Germanization of cultural life, mention is made—entirely lacking in pathos—of the flames of the night of May 10. A footnote, like the word “piano” written on a score, further mutes the effect:

Books that have been found guilty of either “Jewish intellectualism” or “liberalism,” or even of according too much importance to sexuality are being burned in bonfires.*

1. Raymond Aron, *Mémoires* (Paris: Julliard, 1983), p. 63. All translations from the French are my own unless otherwise indicated. Trans.

*Naturally, this fire is mostly symbolic; in reality very few books of value have been burned. The condemned books have been withdrawn from lending libraries. And naturally nothing from the science libraries has been touched.²

The historian Alexandre Szombati reconstructed the events from archival material in an article published in *Le Monde* on May 10, 1982, the forty-ninth anniversary of the autos-da-fé. In this article, Szombati accused Aron of having “trivialized” the incident. Aron takes note of the article in his *Memoirs* and uses it to revise some of the details of his first account, but “on the whole . . . and with respect to the ceremony in general, I’m sticking to my guns. It doesn’t have the magnitude, the grandeur that he [Szombati] accords it.” His memory always puts forward the same image, one that is

lacking in grandeur. . . . Neither crowd nor enthusiasm; perhaps a hundred or so of Hitler’s men in uniform, and Goebbels’s declamation: “*Ich übergebe dem Feuer* [I deliver unto the fire]. . .” the works of Freud “*die Übertreibung der Sexualität* [the exaggeration of sexuality]. . . .” The fire itself, the students’ tirades, Goebbels’s grandiloquence, all of that occurred without an audience. Berliners were not flocking around the Opera. We weren’t far from the fire, and we walked away, among the few passers-by. I had heard fairly often, before and after Hitler’s coming to power, the cries of a frenzied crowd. This time, the crowd didn’t come or hadn’t been summoned. Without an audience, the fire made us tremble at its symbolic significance and laugh at its ridiculous *mise en scène*.³

Aron’s self-criticism is selective here: he admits having underestimated anti-Semitism, but not the Nazis’ bibliophobia. It is difficult not to imagine, behind Aron’s insistence, what I would call “leftist bibliocentrism” and its resistance to the wounded bibliomania that for many intellectuals took the place of a political stance against antifascist militantism. And let’s not forget the anti-book mood in which Aron himself decided to spend those years on the other side of the Rhine. Once he had received his *agrégation*, the young graduate wanted to get away from books. Of course he didn’t burn any, but his state of mind (one that was already being called existentialist) did not predispose him

2. Aron, “Lettre d’Allemagne,” *Europe* (September 1933), p. 129.

3. Aron, *Mémoires*, p. 64. Golo Mann also evoked this shared experience in an issue of *Commentaire* dedicated to Aron: “[Aron] was in Berlin during the terrible year 1932; he went to meetings, heard talk of the future masters; he lived through Hitler’s seizing of power and its aftermath. It was at this time that I made his acquaintance. Together—I don’t know why—we witnessed the auto-da-fé in front of Humboldt University. I sensed his unease at this spectacle, and he showed me his kindness with much tact” (Golo Mann, “Aron vu d’Allemagne,” *Commentaire* 28/29 [1985], p. 149).

to make the *autos-da-fé* the focal point of his portrait of the new Germany, nor to make the politics of the book the real core of Nazism. Not that he minimized what was profoundly perverse about Hitler's cultural policies, but he believed them to be responsible for much greater misdeeds than the too-photogenic book burnings.

The *autos-da-fé* were the acts of "ruffians." Yet this was not the first time iconoclasts had burst onto the cultural scene. These book burnings were indeed shameful, threatening, but they remain an empirical threat; they are not a "historical" threat, not the event that signals a change of era, a *Bücherdämmerung*, humanity's entrance into the postbook age, into postliteracy. The idea of a dog does not bark. The idea of the square does not have four sides. In the same way, books may burn, but the idea of the book, that is, the presence in itself [*présence à soi*] of the idea in the Book, could never fall prey to the flames.

Fifty years later Aron continued to resist the apocalyptic interpretation of these flames as the first chink in the book's armor, or the first crackling sounds of its deconstruction, a wave of panic that would make the reduction to ashes of a finite number of volumes of printed paper into a metaphysical turning point of Wagnerian dimensions. "Perhaps fifty thousand books and manuscripts by forbidden writers were burned, but if the fire destroyed individual copies of these books, it didn't eliminate them from public and private libraries."⁴ Aron repeats his words from 1933: In the age of the mechanical reproduction of copies, that is, in the Gutenberg Galaxy, book burning is destined to remain a symbolic act.

This relative calm in the face of the fate of graphic signs is not entirely without precedent. It brings to mind, for example, the various themes elaborated at the same time by Husserl in his reflections on what he called the crisis of European humanity, a crisis whose origins could be imputed no less to book burners than to those who—exaggerating the scope of this destruction—demonstrate, in their own way, to what degree the spirit had become hostage to its supports. For Husserl, the fetishism of the book was also one of the signs of the renunciation of spirit, of objectivity's reduction to empiricity that constituted Europe's failure to heed its calling. Derrida writes that, for Husserl, "a burning of the world library" should not affect the ideal objectivities (geometry, the pure idealities in general) that transcendental phenomenology freed from all worldly ties.⁵

4. Aron, *Mémoires*, p. 64.

5. Derrida writes: "The hypothesis of such a factual destruction does not interest Husserl at all. While completely recognizing the terrifying *reality* of the current risk, he would deny it any thinkable, i.e., any philosophical significance. No doubt he would admit that a universal conflagration, a world-wide burning of libraries, or a catastrophe of monuments or 'documents' in general, would intrinsically ravage 'bound' cultural idealities. . . . But like that which orients Husserl's reflection (specifically, the fully freed ideality and absolute Objectivity of sense . . .) the threat of an intrinsic destruction by the body of the sign can be ruled out." The "sensible 'exemplars'. . . could *all be destroyed* without overtaking *the very sense of absolute ideality*" (Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's*

2. Paris, May 10, 1934: "The Library of Burned Books"

A year after the autos-da-fé in Berlin, the *Nouvelle revue française* published on the last page of its June 1934 issue an announcement in which the "Comité d'Initiative pour la fondation de la Bibliothèque allemande des livres brûlés" [Committee for the Founding of a German Library of Burned Books] informed the public that its efforts had been rewarded: "This Library," it said, "was inaugurated on May 10, 1934, the anniversary of the autos-da-fé." An address followed: 65 Boulevard Arago, Paris 13.⁶

This anniversary set in motion the great narrative on which the cultural policy of the Popular Front (or even, we should say, the Popular Front as cultural policy) would rest: a cultural policy that would give fire its due [*de la part du feu*]. The flames gave birth to the antifascist phoenix. One year to the day after having undergone trial by fire, the library rose from its ashes in the form of a library of burned books. Can one burn a book and have it too? In the ordinary world, one must choose between the library and the flames, between the book and its ashes. When books are sacrificed by fire, it is not a library but a mausoleum that their remains call for. A library of burned books: how can this oxymoron be interpreted?

With the approach of the turn of the century, the New York Public Library recently organized an exhibit entitled "Books of the Century." One hundred books for a centenary. In reality, there were only ninety-nine books on display. The missing volume was Margaret Sanger's autobiography. In its place was displayed a reader's report, along with the negative reply of the warehouseman: Missing. Ever since it was first published, the book has been a victim—copy after copy, generation after generation—of the relentless fury of the enemies of birth control. The same museographic model could serve for a library of burned books: the destroyed books could be represented by a note card, or even replaced by their ashes—collected, for example, in a small glass urn with—why not?—a piously handwritten label indicating title and author. In memoriam. In memory of the assassinated books.

It was obviously not on this "conceptual" (Genette would say "allographic") model that the Noah's Ark on Boulevard Arago was conceived. Each year, from 1937 on, May 10 was celebrated as the "Day of the Burned Book." In 1938, the theme of this celebration was: "Five Years of Book Burnings." A conference by Peter Fremde was announced: "Paper for the Fire: The Trauma of Emigrated

Origin of Geometry: *An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. [Stony Brook, N.Y.: Nicolas Hays, Ltd., 1978], p. 94).

Dates are important here. Husserl wrote *The Origin of Geometry* in 1936, and it was published posthumously by Fink in 1939 in a French journal, *Revue internationale de philosophie*.

6. Alfred Kantorowicz, "Pour une bibliothèque allemande des livres brûlés," *Nouvelle revue française* (June 1934), p. 1038.

Literature.”⁷ All this institutionalized a Manichaeian view of the world: humanity was divided into bibliophiles and bibliophobes. On one side the destroyers of books, on the other their keepers; on one side the fires, on the other the libraries. Still, despite the Manichaeism of its message, this library, by its mere existence, justified Aron’s (and Husserl’s) relative calm. Its presence in real space on the map of Paris reduced the *autos-da-fé* to symbolic acts.

Catherine David’s recent *Passage de l’ange*—a book that falls somewhere between history and science fiction—presents a narrative daydream based on the crisis of the thirties and forties, and constructed around the utopia of an indestructible book. “One need only invent books that are impossible to burn,” says the novel’s heroine.⁸ The book ends with the discovery of a kind of narrative “germen,” a sort of indestructible bibliographical cell. But this happy ending is the exception. Fiction inspired by the frailty of material supports normally runs in the opposite direction, toward a different outcome. There are in fact two ways of separating the life of the mind from the fragility of material supports, two ways of dissociating the trace from its effacement. The first, as in *Passage de l’ange*, brings into play an incorruptible substance, a support that, even though it is material, cannot be destroyed. The second exploits the opposite theory: since materiality and frailty are indissociable, there is one and only one way for a trace to avoid effacement, and that is to do without material support, to avoid inscription. The perils inscribed in the friability of material supports are prevented because the letter is dematerialized. This is where the fiction of a library (or “alibrary” [*noothèque*]) that would no longer be subject to the vicissitudes of matter and space begins, not because an alchemist would have finally discovered an incorruptible substance, an extended but indivisible substance, but (and must one say, on the contrary?) because the conservation and the transmission of its holdings would no longer be subject to the material and spatial constraints of material supports. The works of the mind would be spared blackmail by the frailty of paper. They would rest upon nothing and be freed from the obligations of place.

This idea served as the organizing principle for Lyotard’s exhibit *Les immatériaux* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), and it is the opposite of the one found in *Passage de l’ange*. In both cases, the book is no longer threatened by the fragility of paper. But in *Passage de l’ange*, the problem is solved by a “supermaterial,” and in *Les immatériaux*, by an “immaterial.” In the former, it is a matter of saving the book as a physical object; in the latter, of releasing the idealities it contains. But this is not the only difference between the two. They also communicate very different historical messages: the reference to the *autos-da-fé*

7. This information is from the chronology found at the end of Albrecht Betz’s book on German emigration to Paris, *Exil et engagement: Les intellectuels allemands et la France (1930–1940)*, trans. Pierre Rusch (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

8. Catherine David, *Passage de l’ange* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1995), p. 29.



*Ruins of the "Holland House" Library
in Kensington, London. 1940.*

that is central to *Passage de l'ange* is absent from Lyotard's exhibit; the optimism of the "immaterials" is ignorant of the antifascist epic and the gloom associated with those dark years. Moreover, in these two works we are dealing with very different crises of the book: *Les immatériaux* takes us from the problems of a bibliography of rarity to those of a bibliography of abundance, overabundance even. It is just as much a matter of fighting against the destruction of books as against their proliferation.

The catalogue of the exhibit consisted of a folder of loose sheets. In the one entitled "Mémoires artificielles," Lyotard refers to the "beginnings of a solution to the hellish problem of storage." The fact that the library has attained the "immaterial" stage renders the innovations of the "imaginary museum" entirely obsolete (in fact, Lyotard mentions Malraux's title, "Le musée imaginaire"), since the image no longer even needs to pass through the book.⁹ The dematerialized letter no longer takes up any room. Books that no longer have any volume are accumulated in this stock of memories without surface. The obstacle of substance has been removed. The barrier to the book has been overcome; the hurdle has been surmounted. Yet, for all that, the specter of the *autos-da-fé* has not been reawakened. The war is over.

9. Much of the thinking in regard to myth that develops during the 1930s (thinking associated with the first artistic explorations linked to the avant-garde of industrial popular culture) is rooted in the desire to escape Gutenberg's Galaxy. Cf. Malraux: "It is printing that limits poets to literature. Myth is literature without a support." Guastalla: "Written paper—and Callimaque is a librarian—replaces the voice of man here" (*Le Collège de sociologie* [Paris: Gallimard, Folio-Essais, 1995], p. 466).

At least at first glance. True, in the technological optimism whose manifesto is this loose sheet, there is nothing that conjures up the violent negation of the book-as-object. Books have become lighter; they have been dematerialized, but not destroyed. Lyotard's text is accompanied, however, by a more pessimistic, historically dated image: a black-and-white photograph whose caption reads "Ruins of the 'Holland House' Library in Kensington, London, 1940." A library has just been eviscerated, or rather trepanned, by a German bomb. This photograph fits perfectly into the line of antifascist iconography. Find the Nazi among the wounded books. Barely has the enclosure around the book been climbed than the once-forgotten specter of Nazism comes to meet it.

It is as if the mere idea of extracting memory from the book gave off a sulfurous odor, as if the book (as effective as garlic and the crucifix against vampires) were the last resort against Nazism. And the corollary is that every failure of the book is in turn a symptom of the brown plague. From there, it is only a small step to the 1953 novel *Fahrenheit 451*, in which Ray Bradbury goes so far as to reduce fascism to a single trait: the destruction of books by fire. And this fire is itself no more than an unambiguous allegory for a mass culture that no longer passes through the printed support.

It is the almost automatic way in which this association is made that interests me here, as if the anguish unleashed by the loss of the object destroyed the ability to distinguish the political (Nazism) from the sociotechnological (the immaterial). The perspective of the enclosure of the book frees a radioactive imaginary that can no longer separate ashes from voices, the destruction of the book by flames from its sublimation on the airwaves. The book is threatened. But is it threatened by Nazism, by the immateriality of the airwaves, or by time? Must one automatically invoke the 1933 *autos-da-fé* every time the frailty of paper is recalled? It is as if both fascism and radio were symptoms of the same technobiological mutation: the new radioactive man, man exposed to waves.

3. Paris, January 17, 1937: The Death of Paper

In the spring of 1937, a few weeks before the opening of the "Days of the Burned Book" at the library on Boulevard Arago, Georges Duhamel—full-time humanist whose specialty was denouncing the dangers faced by the work of art entering the age of mechanical reproduction—published a book called *Défense des lettres*. It is a "defense of letters" in the most typographical sense of the word, a defense of the book and of print. It opens with a science-fiction hypothesis that is the opposite of the one found in *Passage de l'ange*. Duhamel asks the following:

What would our world become if some new disease suddenly attacked paper and reduced all the libraries to dust? . . . This is not a vain question. . . . Everything depends on a caprice of nature, a mutation,

a sudden variation of properties, that could create an animal or vegetable species able to live on paper and rapidly destroy it, or at the very least alter it irremediably. One wonders why this fantastic hypothesis never attracted Wells or his imitators.¹⁰

Duhamel does not, however, impute the death of paper to the brown plague. The incriminated parasite is radio, specifically La Tehesef [T.S.F.: *la télégraphie sans fil*, or wireless].

Oddly, Duhamel didn't realize that a variation of his catastrophe had just been aired. On January 17, 1937 (at 8:30 P.M. to be precise), Radio-Paris had broadcast *La Mort du papier* [The Death of Paper]. The play had begun out of the blue, without a station signal, like a last-minute news flash that was sufficiently urgent to justify interrupting the regular program:

Listeners the world over learned that two scientists [the Lumaine brothers, Balthasar and Nicodeme] had retreated to the island of Cyprus to study the effects of high-voltage currents on the destruction of atoms, when, due to an error in their calculations, all their documents vanished before their eyes. If they cannot stop it, this destructive current will spread throughout the world and everything made of "paper" will disappear without a trace. (*Radio Magazine*)

First the papers on which the Lumaine brothers had written their notes were destroyed. And the destruction continues throughout the world: when a train arrives in a station, the passengers are unable to produce their tickets, or their bank notes. All that remains of cigarettes is rolled tobacco. Housewives' provisions fall to the ground since the paper they were wrapped in has also turned to ashes. No more newspapers. No more card games, office ledgers, theater tickets, etc. (*Radio-Liberté*)¹¹

We recognize here the catastrophic scenario Duhamel had imagined in *Défense des lettres*, but the tone is entirely different. When Duhamel portrays the disease of paper, he only envisions the havoc it would wreak upon the library; for the authors of the radio play, on the other hand, the street is the epicenter of the destruction. All kinds of papers file by—bank notes, cigarette papers, newspapers,

10. Georges Duhamel, *Défense des lettres* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1937). In "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin quotes Duhamel's previous and more famous antitechnology pamphlet *America the Menace (Scenes de la vie future)* (Paris, 1933).

11. Written by two Germans (or German speakers), Walter Tritzsch and G. L. Weisz. I quote from the summaries published by *Radio Magazine* and *Radio-Liberté*. The play itself seems to have disappeared without leaving behind any trace but these announcements and some listeners' commentaries. On the whole, critics were disappointed. On February 12, Suzanne Cilly, in her column in *Radio-Liberté* ("Voix ... sans visage" [Voice ... without a face]), wrote: "The author doesn't seem to me to have taken advantage of all he could have given such an ingenious postulate. ... The attempt, however, is not insignificant and merely requires a better realization."

wrapping paper—but the authors don't shed a single tear for deceased books. The messages are bound up with their respective media; the meaning of the fable changes from one medium to the other. It is in a book that Duhamel warns against radiophonic bibliolysis, against the vibratory disappearance of paper at the hands of the wireless virus; and it is on the airwaves that the authors of *La mort du papier* conjure up a world that will have to learn to get by without paper. *La mort du papier* is not only a radio play, it is also a play *about* radio. In a book, in fact, its message would be refuted by the material support. To announce the death of paper in a book would be mere fiction, whereas nothing prevents us from imagining listeners who could suspend disbelief long enough to wonder, even for an instant, if they weren't hearing an actual news bulletin. The existence of broadcast news is not affected by the death of paper. If the written press were to disappear, radio would take great pleasure in announcing its demise, and could do so, for example, during a newscast such as the one *La mort du papier* was apparently pretending to be.¹²

4. Paris, March 31, 1938: La cité des voix

The plays from this heroic era of radio theater are all more or less preoccupied with a kind of self-referential publicity. The medium-as-subject is a hard-and-fast rule of the genre. Radio talks about radio. This is certainly true of Pierre Descaves's *La cité des voix*, a radio play that was unanimously greeted as the perfect example of the possibilities offered by what was then called *radiogeny*. The author himself admits to having chosen "a marvelously radiophonic problem: the mysterious problem of the survival of voices."¹³

La cité des voix opens with a street scene. The "illustrious playwright" Jean-Pierre Decygne is run over by a bus. In the second act, news of the accident spreads through Paris. In the third act, the victim is on his deathbed. The fourth act gives the play its title: death is a passport to the city of the dead. Freed from the ties of the body, Jean-Pierre Decygne's voice joins the chorus of other posthumous voices. One critic comments: "A magnificent poet has given us this notion

12. The conflict between the written press and the oral press was going through one of its most violent phases at that time. The title of the news broadcast by Radio-Toulouse was "Le Journal sans papier" [The News(paper) without Paper].

13. "It's the story of voices isolated from our bodies and lost in space" (interview with Germaine Blondin in *Radio Magazine*, April 10, 1938). *Radio-Liberté's* critic goes one better: the play celebrates "the perennality of voices, sole survivors of the destruction of bodies" (*Radio-Liberté*, April 8, 1938). Broadcast for the first time on Paris-P.T.T. on March 31, 1938, *La cité des voix* is without a doubt, with Carlos Larronde's *La mort du silence* (broadcast the next day), the most cited work in the prewar French radio repertory. Pierre Descaves (who, in 1922, was part of the first radio newscast team, along with Maurice Privat at Radio-Tour Eiffel) was an influential personality in the small world of French radio. For reasons that most likely have more to do with the consideration people had for him than the quality of his play, the play was almost unanimously praised. But not by *Mercure de France*, the journal edited by radio's enemy Georges Duhamel, whose reviewer praises a new broadcast of the radio play as "a historic date in the history of our literature": "To those who claim that Radio is a menace to literature, M. Pierre Descaves has responded with an act" (Gabriel Brunet, *Mercure de France*, November 15, 1938).

of another world in which only our voices would survive (the voice throws a bridge over the material and immaterial kingdoms). . . . The idea borders on genius."¹⁴ No one seems to have made the obvious joke about the swan song [*chant du cygne*]. But no critic missed the allegory: this world of disembodied voices, voices that produce—in the words of Antonin Artaud—a disembodied phonation [*une phonation sans organe*] is perceived by all as an allegory for the miracle of radio.

La cité des voix, like *La mort du papier*, exploits the hypothesis of a desomatized semantics. The latter presents a culture without books; the former, a spoken word [*parole*] without speaking bodies. Death—whether that of Jean-Pierre Decygne or that of paper—is first and foremost the liberation of the idealities bound to a material support—paper for graphic signs, the human organism for phonic signs. But their removal from this support is also what makes it possible for them to be transmitted and disseminated. In this sense radio fosters scenarios in which several elements, because of their naïveté, bring to mind a crude, popularized version of phenomenological reduction.¹⁵

5. Paris, January 1995. *La cité des voix* (bis)

Unlike *La mort du papier*, *La cité des voix* found a publisher.¹⁶ When I finally decided to read it last year, a surprise was awaiting me at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

14. According to Marcel Berger's summary in the radio column of *Marianne* (April 13, 1938).

15. Paul Deharme writes: "The T.S.F. offers us a means to *neutralize all reality*" ("Proposition d'un art radiophonique," *Nouvelle revue française*, no. 174 (March 1928), p. 413.

16. Pierre Descaves, *La cité des voix. Création radiophonique en un prologue et 4 périodes verbales* (Paris: Denoel, 1938).



"An Enterprise Vineyard Production. Oscar Werner, Julie Christie, in *Fahrenheit 451*. Co-starring

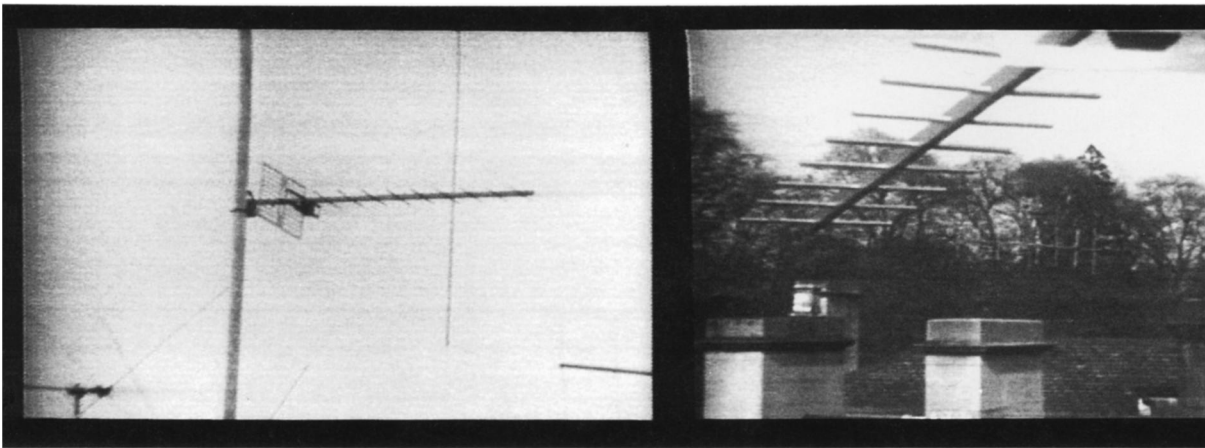
As soon as I passed through the entrance on Rue de Richelieu, voices came to greet me, as if the courtyard had been transformed into a volume of whispers, a cloister of murmurs. I moved through two resonant hedges of phonetic clouds. Coming out of tiny loudspeakers placed like swallows' nests in the four corners of the courtyard, the Bibliothèque Nationale's acoustic assets were being scattered to the winds. The same thing was happening on Rue Vivienne, where smokers inhaled their nicotine amid "voice trees." I was going to read *La cité des voix*. But I had to break the sound barrier before I could reach the silent, microfilmed text.

This *mise en scène* reminded me of something. But what? A few days went by before I remembered the ending of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Montag, the main character, loses his pursuers and comes upon a river, into which he plunges. The current carries him to a clearing where he is greeted by a sound similar to the one that had surprised me, that January morning in 1995, in the city of voices that the courtyard of the Bibliothèque Nationale had become: "And then the voices began and they were talking, and he could hear nothing of what the voices said, but the sound rose and fell quietly and the voices were turning the world over and looking at it."¹⁷ In the end, they speak directly to Montag and greet him as if he were a neophyte who had just been initiated: "Welcome back from the dead."¹⁸

I already mentioned, in respect to Margaret Sanger's autobiography, or, more precisely, in respect to its absence, the exhibit "Books of the Century" at the New York Public Library. I do not refer to it again here because it, too, offered a

17. Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953; reprint, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), pp. 171–72.

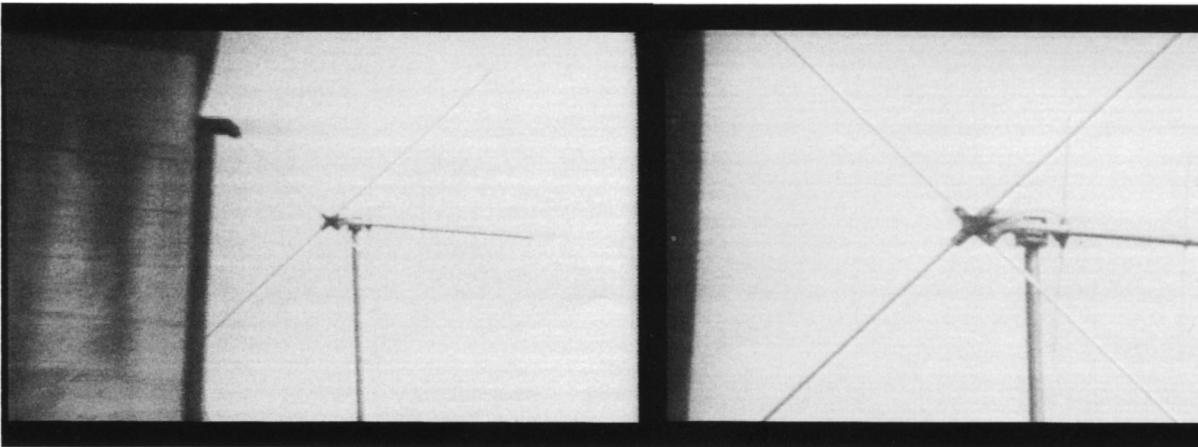
18. *Ibid.*, p. 175



Cyril Cusack, Anton Diffring, Jeremy Spenser, Bee Duffell, Alex Scott. Screenplay by François Truffaut

city of voices like the one at the Paris library. On the contrary, the enclosure of the book was scrupulously respected in the exhibit. There were no audiovisual documents at all. I refer to it because Bradbury's novel was one of the one hundred titles. It was accompanied by a note that read: "*Fahrenheit 451* (1953): Set in a near-future totalitarian state where books are outlawed and burned, the plot centers on the conversion of a 'fireman' from book burner to book saver. . . . The book inspired a 1966 film by François Truffaut and a BBC symphony. It regularly appears on high school and college reading lists."

This summary, which inscribes *Fahrenheit 451* in the same antifascist Manichaeism that had presided at the founding of the Library of Burned Books, makes no mention of the final episode of the novel, an episode that annuls the opposition between "book burners" and "book savers." "Le trace d'une rivière fait crime," Montaigne said. Here, it undoes it. When he crosses the river, Montag doesn't pass from a world where books are burned into a world where they are saved, but from a world where they are burned for the wrong reasons into a world where they are burned for the right ones. As soon as he gets there, his eyes are opened. He learns how to think dialectically; in order to be a book saver, you have to have been a book burner. In order to save a book, you have to burn it. The city of voices of *Fahrenheit 451* deserves—more than the Boulevard Arago institution and in the most literal way—the name "Library of Burned Books." Hardly has he left the city of book burners than Montag is greeted by the voices of burned books, and he is welcomed, one could say, by the voice that fire gave to them, the voice that came to them as they were burning: "We read books and we burn them, for fear of their being discovered. . . . We are arrested, we are searched from time to time, but not the least little accusatory



and Jean-Louis Richard. From a novel by Ray Bradbury. Music by Bernard Herman. Director of

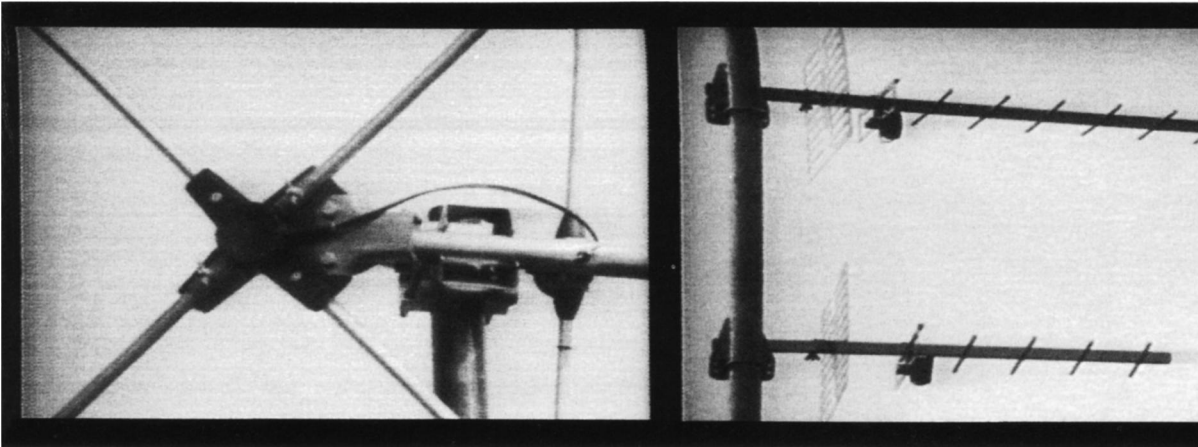
sign can be found on us.”¹⁹ When one hates books, one burns them. But one also burns them when one loves them. Understandably, the exhibit’s organizers hesitated to give too much publicity to this double-edged message, preferring not to confound the trusting humanism of the library’s patrons with this too-subtle double bind.

Two provisional conclusions can be drawn: one, that the best way of insuring that the Nazis won’t burn books is still to burn them oneself. Two, that there is a direct relation between a book’s consumption by fire and its vocalization. To save a book is to translate it into the language of fire. There is something here on the order of one of God’s judgments: only trial by fire can decide if a book should be resolved in ashes or in sounds. A pure book has nothing to fear. Pure: it’s burning to be burned.²⁰

This ambiguity is reinforced in Truffaut’s 1966 film based on Bradbury’s novel. We recall that *La mort du papier* exploited the interest that the medium could have in the message, since radio survived the death of paper that it had announced. Something along the same lines occurs with the cinematographic adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*. For a subject such as the autos-da-fé, all supports are not created equal. They are affected by it in radically different ways. A book that describes a world without books does not touch the same chords as a film on the

19. Ibid., pp. 177–78.

20. Michel Tournier (a student of Gaston Bachelard, the author of the memorable *Psychanalyse du feu*) proposed around this conjunction (pyrophonia) an excellent analysis of Stockhausen’s *Gesang der Junglinge*, which retains of the legend borrowed from the Book of Daniel only “the crystalline voices rising beneath the torture of flames. To the bodies tortured by fire correspond voices tortured by a thousand electronic refinements, the one expressing the other” (*Le vent paralet* [Paris: Gallimard, 1977], p. 127).



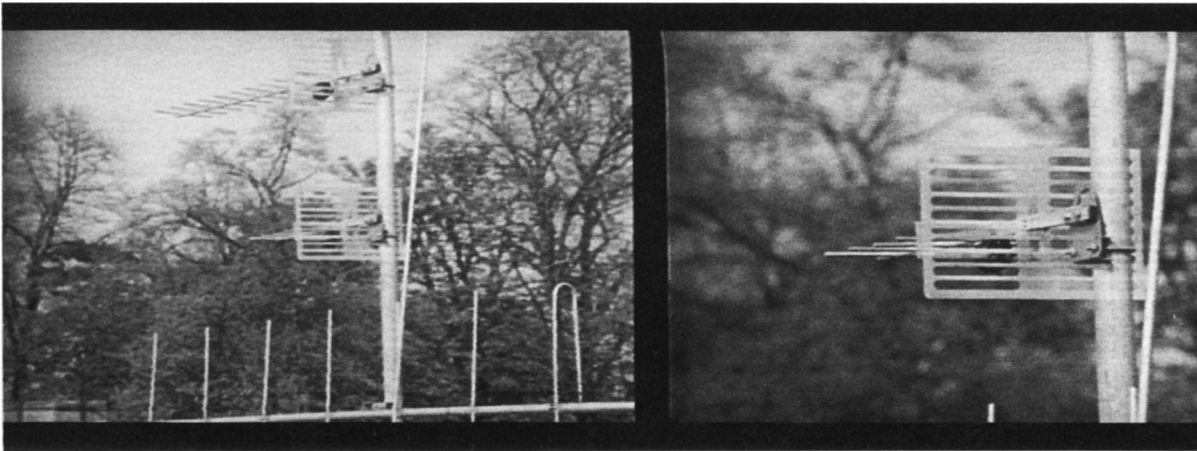
Photography Nicholas Roeg. Color by Technicolor. Art Director Sid Cain. Production and Costume

same subject. Why should cinema, after all, deplore the disappearance of books? *Fahrenheit 451* is not *The Last Picture Show*. It is easy to imagine that the existence or the nonexistence of libraries (at least in the restricted, and traditional, sense of the word) leaves the world of cinema cold. There is no reason for a film, as film, to be affected internally by the death of paper: that's not its problem. The dispossession that such a subject implies for the book stops at the boundary of paper, at the page's edge.

Thus we can rightfully ask if, in Truffaut's treatment of *Fahrenheit 451*, the logic of his medium did not lead Truffaut somewhere he had not foreseen. We can ask on which side of the book's border his film is located. It is possible that Truffaut was led, by the logic intrinsic to his medium, to something diametrically opposed to the humanist cult of the book associated with Bradbury's novel by the pious commentaries of those who prefer not to mention its ending. Its move to film is less an adaptation of the book than its "wasting away."

One only need think of the opening credits that, to my knowledge, have no match in the entire history of cinema. It is the only film that adapts its credits specifically to an illiterate humanity: a viewer who can't read will not miss a thing. One need not have learned to read to know who plays which role, who wrote the book, who adapted it, who directed the film, etc. The camera zooms into a sequence of rooftops studded with TV antennae while a voice recites their names. Not a single word to read, not a letter to identify.²¹ The sound track shares the

21. The idea for these credits came to Truffaut at the end of the filming. See his "Journal de *Fahrenheit 451*" of April 22 (1966): "Rather than showing the credits on the fire truck that I prefer not to show after the first scene, I want to do it on TV antennae. Since nothing written is seen in the film besides books, the credits should be read out loud by a woman's voice" (*Cahiers du cinéma* 179 [1966], p. 21).



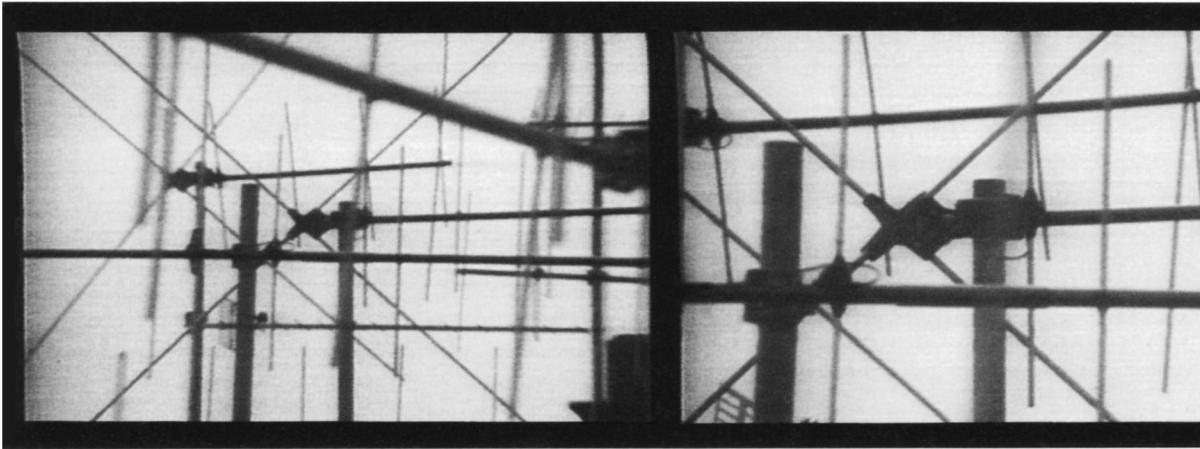
Design Consultant Tony Wilson. Film Editor Tom Noble. Associate Producer Nicky Delamare. Produced

audiovisual stage with the images it accompanies. Bradbury's book described a world after the letter. But it was a book. Truffaut's film, however, has broken with the Gutenberg Galaxy. It doesn't simply represent the world of the novel, it inscribes itself in it. Not one word, not one sentence appears on screen to connect the audience to the world of reading. The film is inscribed in a world of images that—with the final passing of the age of the letter—will remain eternally before the letter [*avant la lettre*]. The authority of the letter has gone up in smoke. It's the end of typography. Teachers who would turn this film into a plea for reading have their work cut out for them, especially if they themselves know how to read.

6. Paris, January 1938

The transformation of the Bibliothèque Nationale's courtyard into a city of voices marked the coming-into-effect (in January 1995) of the law of June 20, 1992, extending copyright registration requirements to audiovisual materials (photographic, cinematic, phonogrammatic). In essence, this law merely systematized and made explicit a certain number of administrative decrees that had accompanied the creation of the national phonothèque in 1938. It was in 1938, in fact, that interests of various origins (historic, artistic, political, economic) con-

Truffaut clearly formulated the association between burning a book and adapting it for the screen a few days earlier. He had just learned that René Clément, the director of *Is Paris Burning?*, had signed a contract for the filming of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. "Is Proust burning in *Fahrenheit 451*? No, but this oversight will soon be remedied" (ibid., April 20).



by Lewis M. Allen. Directed by François Truffaut."

verged, leading to the first measures directed at extending beyond the book the preservation and archiving of documents and monuments.

Nineteen thirty-eight, it will be recalled, was the year Pierre Descaves's *Cité des voix* was broadcast. Is there any relation between the 1938 administrative decrees on audiovisual archiving and the celebration of the radiophonic miracle of the survival of voices?

In the late 1930s, Descaves published a daily radio column in *Ce soir*. The wireless section of the newspaper where it appeared was called, rather neatly, "In One Ear . . . Out the Other." In one ear and out the other: this is precisely what Descaves was lamenting in the melancholy account he wrote following an event that he had suddenly realized was ephemeral. Postbroadcast depression: what is a nonarchivable afterlife? Descaves pats everyone on the back. Himself: wonderful play. The technicians: wonderful production. The actors: same as above. But, the round of compliments over, the sadness of the sound-gatherer takes over: "One regret . . . nothing remains today of such an undertaking. It is to be hoped that radio will record some of these purely radiophonic theater pieces to stock its sound archives."²²

The tone has changed. These regrets are in marked contrast to the enthusiasm with which, before the play was broadcast, everyone—author and radio announcers—sang the praises of the indestructibility of voices without material support. But, after the broadcast, nothing remains. Fleeting immortality.²³ Hence Descaves's nostalgia. It is not enough for a voice to free itself from its corporeal envelope for it to attain idealization and iterability. It also needs to make a sign. That is, what comes in one ear should not immediately go out the other. Unless it leaves a deposit on an archivable support, sound remains merely an event and disappears without a trace, without being able to be repeated, cited, convoked. *Vox, nymphe fugax*. The pioneers of the ephemeral suddenly give in to the temptation of permanence.²⁴ The future is in the air no longer. Could it be in wax? When the archives begin to stock nonbook documents, Descaves feels betrayed by these voices for whom he had secured immortality: they are not reciprocating. The radio triumph of *La mort du papier* is short-lived. While it is true that only radio can proclaim the death of paper, this proclamation leaves no trace. The move to radio does nothing more than consecrate, live, the event's disappearance without a trace. Silence and oblivion close over after the flash.

The first generation of radio theorists (Paul Deharme, Rudolph Arnheim, André Coeuroy, Arno Huth) fostered the utopic idea of a radiophony that would

22. *Ce soir*, April 5, 1938. (*La cité des voix* would be rebroadcast, live, on another station on September 25, 1938.)

23. The pages of radio programs were the preferred place for the advertisers of cherry brandy: "Cherry Rocher éternise / Le temps des cerises [Cherry Rocher makes eternal / The time of the cherries]."

24. "One creates with the hope of entering the patrimony; the work is a durable material: radio broadcasts live, and only once" (Helene Eck, "A la recherche d'un art radiophonique," in *La Culture sous Vichy*, ed. J. P. Rioux [Brussels: Complexes, 1990], p. 278).

<p>BORDEAUX-SUD-OUEST 309 m. 9 P. 1 kw. 968 Ko. 8: Inf. 8.15; Orch. Musette. 8.35; Orch. Viennole. 8.45; Chansonnettes. 11.45; Culte. 12: Inf. 12.25; Pour réussir. 12.25; Mus. de danse. 12.45; Melancolie (Wal-Berg); <i>Tes bras</i> (Goehr); <i>La fille de l'Adjudant Frontis</i> (Kennedy); <i>La Havanaise</i> (Marrino); <i>Amour</i> (Franchini). - 13.15: Concert. 13.45; Culte. 14; Spect. 17; Deb. Jazz. 17.15; Chansonnettes. 17.30; Refrains Chantés. 17.45; Orch. 18; Refrains Chantés. 18.15; Mélodies. 18.35; Extr. de films. 18.50; Orch. Jazz. 19; Inf. 19.15; Refrains Chantés. 19.35; Chansonnettes. 19.50; Brummel, extr. (H. Hahn). 20.25; Le kiosque à musique. 20.55; M. et Mme Frisponlet. 21.10; Refrains Chantés. 21.30; Pour les auditeurs. 22; Inf. 22.15; Mélodies. 22.30; Orch. Mus. de l'Auberge. Blanche. 22.55; Inf.</p>	<p>de Marseille, sélec. 19.45; Orch. philharmon. 14; Inf. 14.5; Galle. 17.30; Concert anglais. 18.40; Chansonnettes. 19.5; Inf. Chron. Sport. 19.15; Opérettes. 19.25; Intermédiaire. 19.45; Autour d'une tasse de thé. 20; Marches militaires. 20.30; G. Chepfer, Y. Leducq, G. Cartil. 20.45; <i>Le bal des brylons</i> (Schreder); <i>Galop de bruyons</i>. 21.15; « Sous le kiosque à musique ». 22; Inf. 22.15; Concert anglais. 23.15; <i>Valse</i> (Widor); <i>Valse de Missouri</i> (Logan); <i>Joli printemps</i> (Linck); <i>L'amour</i> (Axl); <i>Miami</i> (Jacob); <i>Ma belle dame</i> (Carryl); <i>Mon héros</i> (Strauss). 23.35; <i>Caveau à Chez Sardanapale</i>. 23.50; Inf.</p>	<p>WALES 373 m. 1 P. 70 kw. 901 Ko. 17: Reg. 17.30; Em. rel. 17.50; Disques. 18; Reg. 20.55; Em. rel. 21.45; Caus. Inf. 22.5; Reg. 23; A. Rees à l'orgue. WEST 285 m. 7 1.050 Ko. 17: Disques de R. Tauber. 17.20; Reg. 18; Chœurs rel. 18.30; H. Blake, sopr., et D. Noble, baryt.; mélodies. 19; Reg. 20.55; Em. rel. 21.45; National. 22.5; Orch. mun. de Torquay; (Euv. de Philips, Redmann, Biazet d'Eranger, Foulds).</p>	<p>STUTTART 522 m. 6 P. 100 kw. 574 Ko. 16: Mus. lég. 18; <i>Papa Schorsch est octogénaire</i>, pièce. 19; Inf. 19.15; Caus. 19.45; Disques. 20; <i>Marches</i>. 21; (Œuvres de Lortzing. 22.30; Mus. lég. et danse. 24; <i>Lola la magicienne</i>, opérette (Kinneke).</p>
<p>RADIO-LYON 215 m. 40 P. 25 kw. 255 Ko. 12: Orgues. 12.10; Vél. relig. 12.25; Violon. 12.30; Inf. 12.45; <i>Je suis dans la déche</i> (Lukine); <i>Sans vous connaître</i> (Van Fyrs); <i>Brochant</i> (Scott); <i>Romance</i> (Marrilli); <i>Ries</i>; <i>Notre amour</i> (Emer); <i>Si vous étiez ma mie</i> (Rodor); <i>Y a toujours un capitaine</i> (Claret); <i>Romance d'Heuss</i> (Bordin). 13.15; Sélect. d'opérettes. 13.45; Tangos. 13.65; Radio agricole. 18; Concert. 19.45; Inf. 20 à 23; Concert.</p>		<p>ALLEMAGNE BERLIN 356 m. 7 100 kw. 841 Ko. 16: Mélodies. 18; Mus. lég. 19; Inf. 19.15; Caus. 19.45; <i>Danse hongroise</i> (Brahms). 20; <i>Un ciel amour</i>, soirée variée. 22; Inf. 22.30; Mus. légère.</p>	<p>BELGIQUE BINCHE 10: Concert. 10.30; Disques. 11; <i>Valse d'été</i> (X.); <i>Prelude et allegro pour clarinette</i> (Goeyens); <i>Mignon</i> (Thomas); <i>Erwin</i> (Meister); <i>Chagrin d'amour</i> (Kreutzer); <i>Mourmour de printemps</i> (Sinding); <i>Fantaisies italiennes</i> (Delmas); <i>Faust</i> (Gounod); <i>Le Carnaval de Venise</i> (Jeanjan). 12; L. Bailler et ses musiciens. 17; Chanteurs amateurs. 18; Disques demandés.</p>
<p>NIMES 201 m. 1 0 kw. 2 1.492 Ko. 12.15; Inf. 12.25; Variétés. 12.45; Orch. Milit. 13; <i>L'oeil et l'argent</i> (Lebar); <i>Charmes</i> (Curti); <i>Plute d'or</i> (Waldteufel); <i>Déclaration</i> (Curti). 19; Chansons. 19.15; Orch. argentin. 19.30; Inf. 19.45; Concours. 19.60; Fête musicale. 20; Danses chansons. 20.45; Au Moulin Rouge. 21; Aïrs d'opéras. 21.30; Jazz.</p>		<p>BRESLAU 315 m. 8 100 kw. 950 Ko. 16: Mus. légère. 18; Caus. 18.30; Inf. sport. 19; Inf. 19.15; Caus. 19.45; Orch. symphonique. 22; Inf. 22.30; Mus. lég. et danse.</p>	<p>BRUXELLES-FLAMAND 321 m. 9 15 kw. 932 Ko. 16.30; Mat. enfantine. 17.15; Res. sport. 17.30; Disques. Accordéon. 18; Caus.; Mathias. 18.15; Chansons de maîtres italiens et flamands. 18.45; Culte. 19; Quintor de flûtes; <i>Adagio et Scherzando</i> (Wouter); <i>Suite dans le style anc.</i> (Lovelock); <i>Rhapsodie</i> (J. Delcroix). 19.30; Inf. 20; Soirée-Variété; <i>Marche Egyptienne</i> (Joh. Strauss); <i>Lies De Leuzen</i>; Al. Benes dans son répert.; <i>Plenty of center</i> (H. Nicholls); <i>The Vocal Kings</i>; <i>Mote perpetuo</i> (Paganioli). 20.45; A. M. De Jongh dans ses œuvres. 21; <i>La Chauve-Souris</i> (J. Strauss); <i>Steppin' out</i> (Vauchant); <i>Séduction</i> (Kerns); <i>The Vocal Kings</i>; <i>Scènes Napolitaines</i> (J. Massenet). 22; Inf. 22.10; Depuis Torenkelder d'Anvers. 23.15; <i>L'Étudiant pauvre</i> (Millocker).</p>
<p>RADIO-MEDITERRANEE 240 m. 2 P. 1 kw. 1.240 Ko. 12.15; Xylophone. 12.35; Pour réussir. 12.40; Écoutez les mandolines; <i>Tarentelle</i>; <i>Reviens pucelle belle</i>; <i>Tarentelle en vendanges</i>; <i>Ce soir, je veux t'aimer</i>; <i>Les serments des</i></p>	<p>ANGLETERRE NATIONAL (DROITWICH) 1.500 m. P. 150 kw. 200 Ko. 10.25; Em. rel. 12; Em. rel. 13.30; Orch. milit. BBC. 14.30; Trio Cellini. 15; <i>Voire jardin</i>. 15.20; Orch. Med. redéf. balalaïka. 15.45; Disques; Euv. de Kietzky. 17; Un dimanche au 19 siècle. 17.30; Orch. Eng. Phil. 18; Caus. rel. 18.20; Myra Hess,</p>	<p>COLOGNE 455 m. 9 P. 100 kw. 658 Ko. 16: Mus. légère. 18; Inf. 18.15; La tribune. 19; Inf. 19.15; Caus. 19.45; Inf. sport. 20; Chœur d'hommes. 20.30; Extr. d'opérettes. 21.30; Orch. 2^e <i>Symphonie</i> (Schubert); <i>Suite</i> (Gillmann); <i>Symphonie en do</i> (Birel). 22.30; Inf. 23; Mus. lég. et danse.</p>	<p>BRUXELLES FRANÇAIS 483 m. 9 15 kw. 620 Ko. 8.30; Disques. 6.40; Cult. phys. 7; Disques. 7.25; Inf. 7.40; Cult. phys. 8; Disques. 8.5; Chron. 8.15; Disques. 8.25; Inf. 8.40; Disques. 9; Pour les chômeurs. 9.2; Disques demandés. 10; <i>Pierrots et Pierrettes</i>,</p>
		<p>DEUTSCHLANDSENDER 1.571 m. P. 60 kw. 191 Ko. 16; Mus. milit. 19; Inf. 19.15; Caus. 19.45; Inf. sport. 20; Mus. milit. 22; Inf. 22.30; Mus. lég. et danse.</p>	
		<p>FRANCFORT-SUR-MAIN 251 m. 25 kw. 1.195 Ko.</p>	

Page of programming for radio throughout Europe, from Radio Magazine (October 1938). The advertisement for cherries in eau-de-vie plays on Jean-Baptiste Clément's famous song about the brevity of the 1870 Commune's spring: "Le Temps des Cerises."

not be contaminated by the contemporaneous inventions of record and film. The characteristic specific to radio is that it is live. The living word flows from it and expends itself unreservedly. The fact that it leaves no trace cannot be blamed on a temporary defect, linked to the medium's immaturity: that is its very definition. This definition is threatened by the progress of recording technology and by the social success of radio. The schedule grows fuller from year to year, and stations increasingly have recourse to records. The pioneers of radio recognize each other by their radical opposition to this *aggiornamento*. Filling up airtime with recorded music betrays the calling of live broadcasting. Radiophony demands live speech, voices flowing freely from the source, without leaving behind any archivable precipitates. In this sense, radiophonic utopia is a glorification of the drive that Derrida called "anarchival" and Michel Deguy qualified as "lethal."

Its contrast with cinema is more obvious. No longer a vying to occupy the same sensory field (as with the record), on the contrary, it is a question of closing

the border between two sensory fields, of avoiding synesthetic contamination. A division of labor is established in which cinema (still silent in the minds of these early theoreticians) is entrusted with the visual and radio with sound. This desire to dissociate sight and hearing, however, is but a superficial result of the desire for a deeper dissociation, one between space and time. Radio is viewed by its pioneers as a tool for resolving spatiotemporality, and for producing short-term musicality in its pure state, the diachronicity of a phonic expenditure, to the exclusion of all graphic and spatial reference.

It is this “unidimensionality” (the term is coined to describe it) that brings out the real stakes of radiophonic utopia. For the resistance to film is part and parcel of the resistance to the record. In other words, the opposition doesn’t stop between sensory fields, between the optical and the acoustic. Radio is equally allergic to record and film. Thus, its unidimensionality is opposed less to the contamination of sound by the visible as such (even though, as Duchamp demonstrated, the record belongs almost as much as film to the realm of the visible) than to the spatialization of the trace, the localizable deposit, the inscription of the event on an external support, on an artificial memory. What cinema allows to emerge retrospectively by means of the record is the deep complicity between writing, visibility, and space. The detour through film serves to reveal the conflict between *radiophony* and *phonography*. Radio is a transmitter of invisible music.

The return of the graphic in the acoustic goes further. The record is merely the first stage, the beginning of a much more threatening (and more visible) return of the visual in radiophonic unidimensionality. At the first congress for radiophonic art that took place in Paris in 1937, the participants spoke not of radio, but of television and the threat it posed to the subject of the meeting: the radio opens its eyes.