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Dialogue in audiophonic fiction

The case of audio drama

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This chapter deals with the features of fictional dialogue in a narrative genre that relies exclusively on auditory signs. In particular, it examines the case of the radio play. Rather than hypothesizing about necessary conditions and fixed features, the chapter will describe the conventions, constraints and affordances of the audiophonic dialogue. The specificity of audiophonic dialogues will be illustrated in an analysis of radiophonic pieces adapted from two novels by Harry Mulisch, namely *The Stone Bridal Bed* and *The Discovery of Heaven*. The comparison with the literary source text will allow us to better perceive the differences and similarities between the textual and the aural, between the literary and the radiophonic dialogue.

But their unending stream of theories, jokes, observations, and anecdotes was not their real conversation: that took place beneath these, without words, and it was about themselves. Sometimes it became visible in a roundabout way, like when in the past North Sea fishermen located a school of herring from its silvery reflection against the clouds.

Harry Mulisch, *The Discovery of Heaven* (1996: 40)

In aesthetic contexts such as literature and drama, fictional dialogue can give an audience the sense that something ‘takes place beneath’ the actual exchange of words, voices, and gestures, as the narrator of Harry Mulisch’s *The Discovery of Heaven* suggests about the conversation between the main characters of the novel. Something not just beyond immediate meaning but also beyond psychological inference, something which we can term hermeneutic depth. Dialogue in fiction is composed in such a way that it consistently conveys ideas about language and the world. The present chapter examines what characterizes fictional dialogue in an aural art form, namely audio drama.

Audio drama or the radio play can be approached both as a medium and as a genre. As Bronwen Thomas has demonstrated in *Fictional Dialogue*, medium and genre both entail “specific conventions or forms of representation” (2012: 114)

with regard to dialogue. Also, in both respects the radio play is a hybrid and multimodal form with its own conventions pertaining to production, composition, distribution, and reception. Since these conventions, constraints, and affordances affect the shape of dialogues as well as the interpretation of dialogues in audio drama, they will be one of the focal points of this chapter. Furthermore, the effects of these factors will be examined in audio drama dialogue itself. To be able to go into the aesthetic and narrative potential of the dialogue, the chapter refers to dialogues in audiophonic pieces based on two novels by Harry Mulisch. Brief analyses will show how dialogues in audio drama can be fashioned to create narrative meaning, effects of realism, and hermeneutic depth. Along those lines, the chapter sketches a frame to conceptualize dialogue in radio plays as well as a method for analysis.

Audio drama as art

A preliminary note is in order about the status of audio drama in literary, narrative, and media studies, the primary contexts of the approach developed in this chapter. Within the purview of this volume, the question also arises as to how the radio play fits into the landscape of media. To what extent does it resemble other media or differ from them when it comes to modelling dialogue? Is it a medium of literature or rather a genre among other radiophonic genres (the interview, the documentary, etc.)? Audio drama has evolved separately as well as forming alliances with the ‘medium’ of radio, theatrical performance, and, more recently, interactive fiction. Critics and audiences, though, have often looked at the radio play as a literary genre. Historical and cultural factors have fostered this perception. For example, literary writers such as Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Jandl, George Perec, and Dylan Thomas have written pathbreaking radio plays. Still, the radio play is rarely if ever mentioned in dictionaries of literary terms (for example, it is not mentioned in Baldick 2008, Childs and Fowler 2006, or Mikics 2007; Quinn (2006: 349) does have an entry on “radio drama”), which is an indication of its relative invisibility as a literary genre in academic study. This invisibility of original radio plays as well as adaptations for the ear is relative, though, if we consider its importance in particular traditions, e.g., in German literary studies.

Several scholars have argued that the radio play has a distinct identity as a medium and as an art form. In other words, a large degree of medium specificity is granted to radio drama. In *Rundfunk als Hörkunst* (1979), the psychologist of art Rudolf Arnheim clarifies this by contrasting the sonic dimension of radio plays with that of other arts:

The wireless play is self-sufficient, completes itself in the aural; the transmission of an opera, a theatrical production, a cabaret [...] judged by the sound that comes through the loudspeaker, must appear to be only the part-utterance of a greater whole whose perception is denied the listener. (Arnheim 1972: 138)¹

The radio play is accomplished in the acoustic transmission, Arnheim explains, and in that way it distinguishes itself from related art forms. More recently, Elke Huwiler (2005a, 2005b, 2005c) has stressed the distinctive qualities of the radio play as an art form from the perspective of adaptation and narratology. The sub-genre of the “literary” radio play was dominant in the 1950s and the genre then moved in so many different directions that the label “literary” would be misleading as a general denominator for audio drama (Huwiler 2005c).

Against this background, one would expect audio drama to be a regular presence in interart and intermedial studies as well as studies of narrative across media, but audiophonic narratives and radio drama figure far from frequently. Volumes such as *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär* (Nünning and Nünning 2002), *Narrative across Media* (Ryan 2004), *Storyworlds across Media* (Ryan and Thon 2014), which can be seen as indicative of and even central to cross-medial and intermedial research into narratives, do not deal with audio drama. Also, audio drama does not play a prominent role in the now dominant discourses concerning convergence culture (Jenkins 2006), popular literary culture (Collins 2010) and remediation (Bolter and Grusin 2000).² Contrary to film, the pictorial arts, video games, narrative fiction, and drama, the radio play is not well represented in crossmedial narrative studies, though it could enrich some of the claims made in these studies. Considering the narrative and stylistic characteristics of the radio play, one cannot deny its theoretical relevance to these disciplines. In view of the particularity of the radio play’s semiotic constellation, the genre can offer a refreshingly new vantage point for the study of crossmedial and intermedial phenomena such as narrative, description, and dialogue. This becomes clear in the few studies that give the radio play its full due, e.g., the *Handbuch Medien der Literatur* (Binczek et al. 2013), Nicole Mahne’s *Transmediale Erzähltheorie* (2007) and *Narrative and Media* (Fultan et al. 2005).

1. “Das Hörspiel ruht in sich selber, vollendet sich im Akustischen; dagegen läßt die Übertragung einer Oper, einer Theateraufführung, einer Kabarettvorstellung, [...] den aus dem Lautsprecher dringenden Klang als bloße Teiläußerung eines größeren Ganzen erscheinen, dessen Wahrnehmung dem Hörer versagt ist” (Arnheim 1979: 83).

2. There are case studies in which particular pieces are considered from the point of view of remediation, for example in Callens (2007) about David Mamet and Fickers (2013) about Alfred Döblin.

Shaping the dialogue

Audio drama is commonly perceived as a genre as well as a medium. It is considered as one of the traditional *genres* of the *medium* radio and classical audio drama combines features commonly associated with the three traditional literary *genres*. As a genre in the domain of radio, it can be contrasted with genres such as the radio commercial, the radio documentary, the news bulletin, and the radio interview. As an art form, the domain of audio drama is adjacent to literature, performance, and music. Its medium-specific form – namely aural – implies that it is bound to technological environments, but not strictly to the radio as a device. In recent times, radio drama has been revitalized by the internet. Consequently, if we consider the radio play as a medium, we are adopting a pragmatic approach. According to Werner Wolf, a medium in this view can be defined as “a conventionally distinct means of communication or expression characterized not only by particular channels (or one channel) for the sending and receiving of messages but also by the use of one or more semiotic systems” (Wolf 1999: 40). Audio drama is certainly seen as a semiotic whole of this type and therefore as a medium. It is associated with the aural channel and deploys semiotic systems such as speech and music.

The perspective on the radio play as a genre and as a medium allows us to identify a number of conventions, constraints, and affordances for the dialogue. By *conventions* I mean the implicit guidelines for the creation and interpretation, broadly accepted and expected to be followed in a given cultural and historical context. Conventions are the principles “which guide the play of differences and the process of constructing meanings,” Jonathan Culler (2002: 156) writes, following Roland Barthes. One of the conventions of audio drama production for the radio in the Low Countries, for example, is that aesthetic ambitions are limited in radio-phonetic pieces. Unlike the German radio play, radio drama has a predominantly middlebrow profile in the Netherlands and Flanders.³ This becomes particularly clear in adaptations of so-called highbrow literature, which often reduce narrative complexity and stylistic extravagance. Only to a limited extent does the Dutch radio play counter this reduction by exploiting the proper means of the medium. The tendency also governs the expectations of audiences and thus becomes ‘conventional.’

In view of the logic of remediation fleshed out by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000), we can add that the conventional form of audio drama evolves in interaction with other media. Whereas early audio drama draws upon and at

3. On middlebrow literary culture, see Rubin (1992); on middlebrow in the Low Countries, see Van Boven et al. (2008 and 2012).

the same time distinguishes itself from the conventions of theatrical drama, the medium has in more recent decades found new points of reference and departure in film and interactive media. In varying degrees, dialogue in radio drama can lean toward cinematic dialogue, theatrical dialogue, novelistic dialogue and so on. Conversely, we should not forget that radio drama also inspires other media. The interaction is not a one-way street. As Thomas remarks, the advent of the radio as a new medium and the creation of radio drama may “have had at least as much of an impact on novelistic dialogue as the advent of the ‘talkies’” (2012: 136).

Equally relevant to the dialogue, is the convention of expressive voice. The quality of voices⁴ (intonation, pitch, loudness, etc.) becomes such an essential resource to communicate dramatic, psychological, and narrative meaning that it often accumulates more expressive power than it does in everyday communication, in drama, or in film. This is part of the conventional multimodal organization of the radio play. It is common to channel a lot of information to the voice type, intonation, stress, rhythm, and so on.

Constraints are the material and technological limitations of the medium, which also affect the way meaning is created. One of the evident limitations of the classical radio play is the fact that it does not provide visual information.⁵ In view of this constraint, Linda Hutcheon notes, “each character/voice must be aurally distinguishable” (2006: 41). The upshot is simple: if the creators want the audience to be able to identify the respective voices, then the amount of characters should be limited and the voices should not resemble each other. The absence of visual information also implies that signs are mainly organized in a temporal and sequential order, rather than spatial and synchronous. Synchronicity, however, is often exploited as a technique in the simultaneous presentation of several sonic layers (i.e., “mix”). We listen to a dialogue and at the same we can hear extradiegetic music, which corroborates the emotional undertones of the conversation, and diegetic sounds, which indicate the story setting.

As media studies and the theory of intermediality have often demonstrated, the constraints of a medium are a source of creativity. In fact, constraints go hand in hand with *affordances*. Taking their cue from J. J. Gibson, the social semioticians

4. Theo Van Leeuwen (2014) offers an insightful discussion of the aspects and meaning of voice quality as a mode.

5. However, it can suggest the visual information of communicative events in the mode of speech. The narrator can describe the other semiotic modes which function in the storyworld, e.g., gaze (“Hella looked at him in amazement,” Mulisch 1962:45), gesture, movement, and so on. Also, we should not forget that the listener, if he or she is not visually impaired, experiences the radio play in an environment that offers its own sensory information. This information can interfere with or enrich the narrative experience.

Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen see “affordances” as “the potential uses of a given object, stemming from the perceivable properties of the object” (Van Leeuwen 2005: 273). In David Herman’s study *Basic Elements of Narrative* (2009), media and genres are described with the terms “constraint” and “affordance” as systems of limitations and possibilities for storytelling practices. The radio play, too, is a medium-specific system that makes certain practices (for our purposes: practices of dialogue) possible and at the same time limits the options for these practices. Out of these limitations, new creative forms can arise. Needless to say, affordances interact with cultural conventions: “not all the potentials in the *materiality* of a mode are used to become affordances of that mode in a particular culture” (Kress 2014: 62–63).

For the make-up of dialogue, the most obvious constraint results in a striking affordance. Because of the absence of visual signs, radio-drama dialogue is more flexible in disrupting spatial and temporal continuity. In a radiophonic piece, dialogues can be staged between characters in different times and places, between animals, between dead and living creatures, between objects and persons, and so on (Vielhauer 1999: 79). Another characteristic affordance of the radio play is the use of stereophonic effects to differentiate and spatially position the participants in a dialogue.

The genre and the medium (production, reception, and distribution) of the radio play, and its modes (voice, spoken language, sound, silence, music) are shaped by the interplay of conventions, constraints, and affordances. The same goes for the dialogue which is part of it. This functional approach can be mapped out as seen in Figure 1. In the table, indicative examples are given for each item.

In the above discussion, the contours of dialogue in audio drama become visible from a functional point of view. For a broad view on the actual manifestations of dialogue Annette Vielhauer’s probing study of audio drama dialogue is an excellent source. In *Welt aus Stimmen* (1999), she develops a typology which covers the whole gamut of dialogic forms from dialogue between characters, to internal dialogue, imagined dialogues, monologues, and the experimental ‘play of voices’ (“Stimmenspiel”). The three main categories, scenic, narrative, and interior dialogue, correlate with three types of audio drama (scenic, narrative, and subjective). Within the scenic category, which is central to our discussion here, Vielhauer discusses several variants (1999: 96–158), such as the interview, the interrogation, the conversation, and the dialogue with music as a conversational instance. The rich variety of dialogical forms in the radio play is described in detail and illustrated by a range of German pieces. Vielhauer’s formalist approach to dialogue complements the one presented in this chapter in that it aims at a more or less exhaustive typology rather than considering the possibilities and limitations of the medium, which can give rise to the range of types and variants.

	Conventions	Constraints	Affordances
genre: – fiction	fictional pact (cf. willing suspension of disbelief), concentration of information in dialogues	low effectivity of truth claims	inclusion of the fantastic and supernatural
– radio play	mix of dramatic, epic, and lyrical elements	(see ‘medium’)	(see ‘medium’)
medium: – production	use of indexical sounds to evoke a setting, avoidance of long silences	actors in a dialogue are often not in eye contact	imaginative and narrative power of sounds (e.g. the story setting can be total darkness)
– reception	proximity of the sound source, listening in a private setting	mnemonic limitations	interaction, active participation of the listener
– distribution	length of a one-act play	transience of radio broadcast	collective listening in an intimate environment

Figure 1. Conventions, constraints, and affordances of the radio play

Three audiophonic adaptations

Before we move on to further distinctions, I wish to introduce three radiophonic pieces, which will then serve to illustrate the specificity of dialogue in radio drama in terms of conventions, constraints, and affordances. The pieces are three adaptations of novels by the internationally renowned Dutch author Harry Mulisch (1927–2010). The fact that his work is well-known is not irrelevant to the analysis of the radio plays. Since the two novels, *The Stone Bridal Bed* (*Het stenen bruidsbed*, 1959) and *The Discovery of Heaven* (*De ontdekking van de hemel*, 1992), were such a literary as well as commercial success in the Netherlands and Flanders, the Dutch adaptations could take it more or less for granted that the audience was already familiar with the plot. As Linda Hutcheon reminds us in *A Theory of Adaptation*, the recognition of the source is an important part of the audience’s response to adaptations: “Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation” (2006: 4). The Dutch listener may be expected to know the story and therefore also to project knowledge from the source text onto the adaptation.

The Stone Bridal Bed was adapted for the radio and directed by Hans Karsenbarg.⁶ Its playing time is 83 minutes (the original novel consists of 184 pages). *The Discovery of Heaven* is an adaptation by Valerie Stiegele in 2006, directed by Hans van Hechten, and also distributed on cd and mp3 by HoorSpelFabriek. Its playing time is 131 minutes; the novel is 927 pages long. Both novels were translated into English (in 1962 and in 1996 respectively). In Germany, too, the work of Mulisch is widely read and appreciated. The third radio play mentioned in this chapter is the German version of *The Stone Bridal Bed* (*Das steinerne Brautbett*, 2005), directed by Norbert Schaeffer on the basis of a translation by Gregor Seferens and an adaptation by Lou Brouwers. The piece was produced by the Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (MDR). Its playing time is 89 minutes. It was broadcast by Deutschlandfunk on September 22, 2007 and by MDR on February 9, 2015.⁷

The three adaptations are of particular pertinence to the study of dialogue (across media), because of the structural role of dialogue. In *The Discovery of Heaven*, the general dialogical structure of the source text is maintained (which implies an act of medial transposition) and narrative information is often transmitted to the dialogues. The extradiegetic narrative situation is dialogical. An angel in heaven reports to his direct superior (“lord cherubim”) that his mission is accomplished. The superior inquires about the details of the mission, so that he in turn would be able to report them to the boss (God). When the angel starts telling the story, the narrative soon shifts to an intradiegetic level. On that level, dialogues between the main characters are crucial to the progression of the story and the dynamics of the narrative as a whole. In particular, the three main characters – Onno, Max, and Ada – and their son Quinten (who is suggested to be the offspring of all three) are the main conversational instances.

As an extradiegetic narrator the angel often summarizes events in between scenes and introduces the setting of the next one. In that respect, *The Discovery of Heaven* integrates storytelling conventions of both an epic and a dramatic tradition. These conventions are not simply combined, but also parodied: the figure of the angel assumes the typical functions of an omniscient narrator. He does not just recount the story, but also manipulates the course of the events as if he was standing above and outside the story world but at the same time he belongs to the

6. It was first broadcast by the Dutch public broadcasting service (TROS) on May 4, 1986, and twenty years later commercially distributed on CD and MP3 by HoorSpelFabriek (2006).

7. Unless otherwise specified, I am referring to the audiophonic pieces and not the novels when I mention the Mulisch titles below. To differentiate between the Dutch and the German version of the early novel, I use the letters “D” and “G.”

same fictional universe as the other characters. By divine intervention he is able to affect the lives of the intradiegetic characters. At the outset, he explains how he succeeded in bringing together Max and Ada for the conception of Quinten Quist, who would then be the person destined to bring back to heaven the tables of the testimony, which stand for the contract between God and man. In the sonic composition, the two dialogical layers are clearly distinguished: an electroacoustic effect is added to the voices of the angel and his master, which makes them sound as if speaking through a telephone. The effect appropriately connotes long distance, whereas the voices of the intradiegetic characters are presented without additional effects.

The Stone Bridal Bed tells the story of Norman Corinth, an American dentist who travels to Dresden (Germany) for a conference. Thirteen years earlier, he had been a gunner in the large-scale bombings of the city at the end of the Second World War. In the personal interactions (dialogues, physical contact, etc.) Corinth has with his German conference guide Hella Viebahn and his German colleague Alexander Schneiderhahn, among others, the ethical and ideological disorientation of the war and the postwar period is evoked. The ruins in the city and the stories people tell confront Norman with the devastation to which he contributed. However, he keeps his exact involvement hidden from Hella and Schneiderhahn, and the stories about their own roles during the war also remain partly enigmatic. In the cryptic manner the characters allude to their experiences in dialogues, the thematic threads of the novel take shape. A key scene is the conversation Norman, Hella, and Schneiderhahn have in a local bar. After listening to a story of a married couple about the Dresden bombings, Hella lashes out at Schneiderhahn:

- [Hella:] I think it is shameful, shameful [...] to use people who come here to enjoy themselves to satisfy your curiosity. I can well see that you were not here in the war.
- [Schneiderhahn:] But I was here [...]
- [Hella:] Then why did you say you weren't?
- [Schneiderhahn:] I had my reasons.
- [Hella:] I am sorry, but these are no reasons at all to use other people's suffering for anything. Perhaps you are ashamed in front of Herr Corinth? Because you were at the front?
- [Schneiderhahn:] I was not at the front. That is to say ... [...] In a sense it was the front.
- [Hella:] The front is the front. I suppose Herr Corinth was at the front too. [...]

[Schneiderhahn:] Sometimes things are more complicated. There was a home front too.

[Hella:] A home front?

[Schneiderhahn:] Didn't you know, [...] that certain scattered parts of Germany, small areas in comparison, were declared to be the front? Even when they were in the middle of quiet forests or peaceful hills?⁸

While there are significant differences in delivery (e.g., intonation), the Dutch and the German version render the conversation in the same way in terms of content, speech acts, and turn-taking. After Schneiderhahn's final revelation, which may sound cryptic to the listener at that point in the narrative, Hella runs to the toilet and vomits. Her reaction adds to the dramatic quality of the scene. Later on, Norman guesses Hella's interpretation of Schneiderhahn's words. They surmise that Schneiderhahn worked as a dentist in one of the concentration camps. After Hella has made some inquiries, however, it turns out (or so we are led to assume) that Schneiderhahn was a member of the resistance. By then, it is clear that Norman and Schneiderhahn mirror each other as characters. They both assume the role of a saviour as well as a perpetrator – this role-taking is symbolically replicated in the dialogues.

As a whole, the source text offers a typical novelistic mix of narratorial discourse and character discourse. In the discourse of the heterodiegetic narrator, brief descriptive passages which introduce setting or character, alternate with summaries of events and characters' thoughts and feelings. The main focalizer is Norman Corinth. The dialogues are the prevailing form of character discourse and make up a significant part of the novel. What is more, narrative instabilities and thematic tensions are introduced and elaborated mainly in the dialogues, as in the above example.

The comparison of the Dutch and the German adaptations of *The Stone Bridal Bed* is particularly suited to illuminate the practices of dialogue in audio drama. The two versions represent two different strategies for fashioning novelistic dialogue into audiophonic dialogue. The Dutch version, broadcast in 1986, is a scenic radio play:⁹ it systematically eliminates the narratorial discourse, reducing the text almost exclusively to the dialogues. The German version is a narrative radio play, in which the narrator's voice is maintained and carries the structure of the radio play. In other words, dialogue is the skeleton of the Dutch version, whereas the

8. The quotation is taken from the English translation (1962:66–67) and adapted to match the dialogue in the radio play. The bracketed parts refer to changes I made to the English translation to go from the novelistic text to the radiophonic dialogue.

9. For the distinction between 'narrative' and 'scenic' audio drama, see Vielhauer (1999).

German version embeds it in the narrator's discourse. What is more, the German version weaves the narrator's comments into the dialogues more emphatically than the source text.

In both *The Discovery of Heaven* and *The Stone Bridal Bed*, the dialogues are characterized by a form of irony that is typical of Mulisch's characters and at the same time resonates strongly with the Dutch cultural context. It is a type of irony that verges on sarcasm. The landlord Ludwig, for example, when commenting upon the flies Norman notices in the house, says: "Every year the same. They escape from the wind into the houses. What can you expect? It's a Dresden tradition to die on a large scale." Irony, as a kind of indirectness, contributes to the interpretive layeredness of the dialogues in the three pieces. Whether we presume to understand all the allusions or not, it is quite clear that the conversational exchanges between characters have several functions and meanings at the same time. When Norman says to Hella that he is "a Greek, slain under Agamemnon," for example, the intertextual link between the events in the novel and the Trojan war is made visible, a link that is also apparent in the names of the two characters, "Hella" (Helena/Hellas) and "Corinth." We can read the comparison to Agamemnon as an ironic reference which portrays Norman as an intellectual and detached character, but the reference also belongs to a thematic thread of *The Stone Bridal Bed*, which presents history and myth as the inevitable repetition of the same patterns. In short, features of the dialogue can be motivated mimetically, thematically, or structurally. They can add to the illusion of realism, to the thematic coherence, and/or to the narrative progression. This is a dynamic and functional view on the composition of dialogue in audio drama.

So where can we see the conventions, constraints, and affordances at work in these pieces? First, let us consider the mode of voice. In the opening scene of *The Stone Bridal Bed* (D), when Norman meets Hella Viebahn and Ludwig, the owner of the guesthouse, the following exchange takes place:

- [Ludwig:] And where is Doctor Chwang Kai-shek staying, may I ask?
 [Hella:] Doctor Chwe Unsang has a room in town. [...] Later on I will laugh about your joke, I have no time now. I hope [...] you don't mind a room so high up[, Herr Corinth]?
 [Norman:] On the contrary.
 [Ludwig:] [In the middle of the city] everything is always full. [...] Sometimes there are four or five congresses at once. Communism is good at having congresses.
 [Hella:] Do you think we ought to have fewer, Herr Ludwig?¹⁰

10. Translation based on Mulisch (1962:17).

Since the voices display a slight reverb effect, the listener is aware of the fact that the conversation takes place *inside* the guesthouse. A first thing to note about the information associated with the voices is that the qualities of the male voices are distinct. In both the Dutch and the German version, the voice quality of Norman is rather neutral whereas Ludwig's voice is more expressive. The Dutch Ludwig's voice is deep, almost solemn. The German Ludwig has a rough and raspy voice. In the dialogue, the general ironic tone is striking. The irony of Ludwig's question is apparent from his intonation. In Hella's answer, the ironic tone is reinforced. Her voice is somewhat lowered and the intonation more monotonous, which has the effect of suggesting reproach. Pitch is used to convey an attitude that remains implicit in the words. A similar vocal strategy is used for the final sentence of the quoted passage. Whereas the novel makes the tone of the conversation more explicit in the narrator's discourse ("Hella looked hard at him, Corinth was amused; her eyes gleamed with fighting spirit," Mulisch 1962: 17), the Dutch adaptation transposes the gist of this information to the mode of voice. In the German version, the information conveyed by this mode is supported by the internally focalized narrator's comment concerning Hella's appearance ("her eyes gleamed with fighting spirit").

In *The Stone Bridal Bed* (G), the narrator's voice and that of the characters are marked stereophonically. This has become a convention of the radio play, often also used to indicate a shift from a narrating self to an experiencing self (cf. Mahne 2007: 105). The above-mentioned scene in the bar deploys stereophonic effects in the alternation between the narrator's voice (right) and that of the characters (left), and also between characters. The man and woman who tell their personal story about the Dresden bombings (far left) are distinguishable from the other characters in the scene (middle left).

Moving on from voice to sound and music, we can notice how in *The Discovery of Heaven*, the dialogue which functions as the frame narrative is often accompanied by extradiegetic music and sound. These dialogues between the angel and his superior (e.g., in "Sancta Sanctorum," Track 12 on cd 2) are enriched by music and sounds, such as scanty monotonous music for strings and thin, synthesized notes. These advance not so much the interpretation of the characters' psychology but the suspenseful and dramatic quality of the events they are discussing.

Modes and functions

To recapitulate: radio drama dialogue is shaped by the conventions, constraints, and affordances of the medium and the genre. Within these boundaries, a range of dialogical forms, as described by Vielhauer (1999), flourishes in audio drama. A further step is to discern the semiotic resources and modes of the radio play

and the way these elements are linked, in order to untangle the composition of dialogue. A final step is – as announced – the analysis of functional dimensions of the dialogue: the mimetic, the thematic, and the narrative.

From a multimodal and semiotic point of view, the main elements of audio drama are voices (voice quality, timbre, pitch, volume, shape), speech (spoken language, including paraverbal and non-verbal communication, accent and register), silence, sound/noise, and music. The signification process of the audiophonic dialogue also depends on linking strategies, which is a broad term for ways of connecting and manipulating the mentioned semiotic elements: sound effects, blending, mix, montage, and stereophony.¹¹ The examples discussed above have demonstrated how these elements can be configured to add to the meaning of the dialogue.

In addition, the dialogue in radio drama obeys the laws of fictional dialogue, as they developed in novelistic fiction and theatrical plays, among other contexts. Compared to other radiophonic genres (e.g., the documentary or the interview, see the chapter by Jarmila Mildorf in this volume), the dialogue in audio drama is more intrinsically teleological. An interview can be more or less orchestrated and driven by individual as well as collective goals (so it would be misguided to consider it as neutral, natural or spontaneous), but the dialogue in audio drama is additionally teleological on a narrative and thematic level. So, for example, it is conventional for fictional dialogues to concentrate narrative information in a conversation: the bar scene in *The Stone Bridal Bed* gives us *exactly* enough information to grasp why Hella is angry with Schneiderhahn. In a natural dialogue, this information might be dispersed over a larger time frame and/or over several conversations and other communicative events.

Because of medium and mnemonic constraints, moreover, the dialogue in audio drama has to include sufficient contextual clues, concerning changes in the environment, the appearance and movements of characters, the characters' body language and gaze. The kind of information a movie would show or a novel could translate into description, can partly be channeled to extradiegetic and diegetic sound, or to an extradiegetic voice, but it is conventional for the radio play to weave part of this information into the dialogue.

In *The Stone Bridal Bed* (D), a shift from a sex scene and a scene of war to a scene at a conference is (ironically) marked by the sound of applause fading in. We can hear the buzz of an audience and then the sound of footsteps and Hella's voice. They indicate that Hella is walking towards Norman, who embodies the

11. The list of modes and linking strategies is based on extant literature: Crisell (1994: Ch. 7); Schmedes (2002: Ch. 2); Huwiler (2005a: 54–70), Crook (2012: Ch. 1).

point of audition in the scene, as he does throughout the piece. The impression that the conversation starts while Hella is still approaching, is also conveyed by the increasing volume of her voice and the decreasing distance from the microphone. While they talk, the buzzing remains part of the soundscape and a reverb effect also reminds the listener that the scene takes place inside. At the moment Norman asks Hella about Schneiderhahn, the latter appears in sight. In the absence of visual clues, the dialogue makes this explicit:

[Norman:] Did you inquire about our mutual friend?

[Hella:] Be careful. [... Ah,] Good afternoon, Herr Schneiderhahn [...]
The inseparable friends were late again, of course.

[Norman:] Herr Schneiderhahn[!]¹²

What is visually available in the storyworld, is presented as audible clues in the radio play. In the successive words “Be careful” and “Ah good afternoon,” the diction of the actress (Henny Orri) indicates that the former utterance is meant as a warning for Corinth and the latter is directed at Schneiderhahn. When Hella leaves the scene, Norman says “you look pale” to Schneiderhahn, which is a piece of visual information the novel presents in the narrator’s text.

Of course, the concentration of information in dialogues is not merely (and not so much) a matter of compensation. It is also integral to the progression of the narrative. In that respect too, dialogue in the radio play differs from dialogue in other radiophonic genres. The dialogues play an often pivotal role in the development of the story. As Thomas points out, referring to Kozloff’s study of cinematic dialogue, “dialogue is crucial for providing the audience with a backstory” and “plays a key part in terms of both the cohesion of the plot and the audience’s ability to piece together the narrative threads” (2012: 77). Dialogues have a narrative function, that is. On the basis of this function, Vielhauer distinguishes between two types of scenic dialogue, namely action-oriented and situation-oriented. The narrative function of action-oriented dialogue resides in the fact that it contributes to the linear and teleological movement of the action (1999: 79).

In *The Discovery of Heaven*, the climax of the story is prepared in dialogues such as the following:

[Onno:] Do you know anything about the Bible?

[Quinten:] Only a bit. Almost nothing about the Old Testament.

[Onno:] Doesn’t matter. That’s what your old father’s there for. You probably know that Moses led the Jewish people out of exile in Egypt. After that they wandered through the desert for forty

12. English translation based on Mulisch (1962: 120).

years, looking for the promised land. At the very beginning of that period, Jahweh had given him all sorts of instructions on Mount Horeb and finally he was given ... [*sound of a thunderclap*] A clap of thunder. How appropriate.

[Lord Cherubim:] *It seems to me you indulged in your taste for theatrical effects again, Angel.*

[Onno:] Finally, Moses was given the Ten Commandments, which Jahweh had written on two stone tablets with his own divine finger. You've heard of the Ten Commandments, I hope?

[Quinten:] Of course, 'Thou shalt not kill' and so on.

[Onno:] Well, when Moses returned from Mount Horeb, the Jews had started worshipping a golden calf instead of Jahweh and that is the moment when Moses became furious. That's how Michelangelo depicted him here.

[Quinten:] And where are those stone tablets now?

[Onno:] Nobody knows. Gone without a trace.

[Quinten:] Gone?

[Onno:] Yes, first they were in the temple of Jerusalem, but since the Babylonian exile...

[Quinten:] We were going to the Lateran, weren't we? Let's go.

[Onno:] The Lateran? What on earth are you looking for, lad?

[Quinten:] Nothing, I'm just a tourist. [*music*]

[Angel:] *But Quinten had the feeling that everything was gradually falling into place.*¹³

The teleology of the narrative surfaces in this dialogue, which is explicitly framed by the dialogue between the angel and his superior on the extradiegetic level. On the intradiegetic level, it becomes clear that Quinten is predestined to hand back the tables of the Decalogue to Heaven. Gradually, he is piecing together the puzzle of his life and understands what he had unconsciously been aspiring for.

In the scene, he is in Rome together with his father, Onno, from whom he learns more about the Old Testament. The encyclopaedic knowledge condensed in the dialogue propels the plot and adds to the thematic coherence of the novel. In other words, the narrative and the thematic dimension of the dialogue are allies

13. The quotation is adapted from the English translation of the novel (Mulisch 1996: 596–598). Since the changes between novel and radio play are substantial, they are not made visible in the quotation itself.

in this scene. On a thematic level, the dialogue informs the listener (along with Quinten) about the symbolic and historical meaning of the Testimony. This allows the listener to interpret Quinten's task. Since technology and science have demystified the world, God has gradually moved out of sight in Western society and the contract with God, symbolized by the Testimony, becomes invalid. *The Discovery of Heaven* reflects upon this substitution of religious thought by scientific thought. On a narrative level, the dialogue increases the suspense by displaying Quinten's increasing awareness and his concomitant goal-oriented behavior (e.g., the determination to go to the Lateran). For the listener, the question as to whether and how Quinten will succeed in returning the tablets gains prominence and in that way the dialogue enhances the degree of narrativity.

While the thematic and narrative functions are foregrounded in the conversation between Quinten and Onno, a third dimension is also at work in the dialogue. First, the radio play creates a story setting (Rome, church of S. Pietro in Vincoli) which makes the dialogical exchange plausible in terms of realism. Second, it draws upon syntactic and pragmatic procedures which suggest the resemblance to natural dialogue. The strategies of turn-taking and the signals of politeness and familiarity are similar to those of natural dialogue. In that sense, they fulfill a mimetic function. As a result it becomes credible for the listener that these characters with their particular traits in that particular situation have this kind of conversation.

The mimetic dimension of dialogue in radio play is succinctly evoked by Tim Crook in a description of what he calls the "quality of dialogue": it is

determined by the presence of active, direct and emotional language as opposed to reflexive, passive and neutral communication. Believability is increased by specificity. Quality is also improved when dialogue is more specifically constructed in relation to a character's background and emotional state. If dialogue is reacting to action or situation then it must be dramatic and poised on polarities. (1999: 188)

The features of audio drama dialogue Crook describes contribute to the illusion of realism and to the radio play's narrative coherence.

The example from *The Discovery of Heaven* demonstrates that in order to understand the functioning of dialogue in audio drama, it is useful to differentiate between three kinds of motivation for semiotic signs involved in the dialogue (voice, speech, sound, music, and silence) and for linking strategies (stereophony, montage, and mix). I consider the three dimensions – the narrative, the thematic, and the mimetic – as typical of any fictional composition. The three-fold distinction takes its cue from Boris Tomashevsky's thematology (1965) and James Phelan's rhetorical view on characters as having a mimetic, thematic, and synthetic dimension (Phelan 1989). The mimetic, the thematic, and the narrative dimension

are the three balls fictional dialogue constantly juggles in the air, as we have seen in the examples. Depending on the type of dialogue and the type of radio drama, those three balls will each have a different size. In experimental pieces, for example, the mimetic dimension will be less dominant. For individual pieces, it is possible to describe the relative weight of the three dimensions and to analyse how the three are attuned to each other. In the dialogical forms of *The Stone Bridal Bed* (D and G) and *The Discovery of Heaven*, the three dimensions are quite balanced and reinforce each other.

The combinations of modes and functions are summarized in Figure 2.

	Mimetic	Thematic	Narrative
semiotic modes voice speech silence sound/noise music	e.g. loudness of physical voice connotes distance between characters	e.g. loudness connotes power	e.g. loudness connotes 'climax'/ increased suspense
linking strategies sound effects blending mix montage stereophony	e.g. a mix of diegetic sound and music to evoke a setting	e.g. music underlines motifs	e.g. shift from one setting to the next one marked by a cut

Figure 2. semiotic modes and functions involved in audio drama dialogue

In the analysis of dialogue in the radio play, Figure 2 supplements Figure 1. What is considered as mimetic or recognized as thematically relevant, for example, depends on conventions; genre constraints play a role in the creation of suspense (narrative function); and so on.

As I hope to have shown in the theoretical discussion as well as in the sample analyses, it is in the interplay of medium/genre conventions, constraints, affordances, modes, and functions that the radiophonic dialogue and its meaning take shape. Within that configuration, each semiotic resource and mode can add to the exchange of speech acts on the story level and to the listener's interpretation of characters' conversations. So, for example, voice quality contributes to characterization, intonation often indexes psychological tensions below the surface of the dialogue, music can disclose the emotional undertones in a conversation and so on. As the examples taken from *The Stone Bridal Bed* and *The Discovery of Heaven* have demonstrated, the semiotic resources exploited by the radio play can fulfill several functions in the dialogue. I have distinguished between three main

functions: the mimetic, the thematic, and the narrative. In my view, the resulting functional and multimodal approach to dialogue in audio drama can do justice to the specificity of both the genre and medium and at the same time reveal the complexity and layeredness of fictional dialogue.

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