

Radio evolution

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***“Radio is dead... Long live to the sound”*: Becoming a new media².**

Bons dias. Good morning.

I’m very grateful to the ECREA Radio Research Section for giving me the opportunity to be here, in this International Radio meeting... *E o meu parabéns à Universidade do Minho pela sua estupenda organização*... And I beg your pardon if sometimes my english is not understandable. Anyhow, I hope all I am going to tell you this morning, makes sense.

Radio is dead... Long live to the sound... This is the head-line I’ve chosen. *Long live to the sound*... because the sound is still able to broadcast a good story, if this story is broadcasted by a good storyteller, provided that, he or she, knows all the secrets of the sound language, and, also, all the secrets of the sound perception. That’s to say: the secret of how a sound, can becomes an emotion in the heart of listeners. Because the narrative frame of the story, and the quality of the sound (the sound of voice, the sound of music), are crucial for achieving an emotional impact in the audience.

The head-line of this reading, *Radio is dead... Long live to the sound*, needs a complementary question: Could the Radio be the new sound-media, for the new soundscape or sound-sphere, for the new listeners...? And... Could the Radio be the main sound reference of the new sound-media, whatever the sound-reproduction technologies could be?

My answer takes into account, the market position I hope, Radio will have in the new sound-sphere, where tradicional media and new media will have to live together.

From this point of view...

¹ *Radio evolution* is the internacional meeting organized by the *Radio Research Section* of the *European Communication Research and Education Association-ECREA*, in the *Universidade do Minho*, on September 14-16, 2011.

² Armand Balsebre’s reading.

If Radio doesn't go-on underestimating the importance of having a good story.... of having high-quality voices... good stories well told... of having a good Department specialized in sound creativity... If Radio knows how to fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds of accurate words, fighting against the free and senseless words we listen every day... If Radio, finally, knows how to be one of the best platforms for broadcasting artistic sounds, one of the best channels for the public communication, for the timeliness, and one of the best companions in our lonely moments... and knows how to invest more money in contents, rather than to invest more money in broadcasting technologies...

Of course: Radio could be the new sound-media for a new sound-sphere, for new listeners, for any sound-reproduction technology.

The challenge Radio has now, in our new sound-sphere, in the searching of a new identity, trying to reborn from a death which has been announced so many times, ... the challenge, I repeat, will depend on how Radio learns to take advantage of his apparent disadvantage: Radio is *only* a sound media... Becoming a new media, Radio ever can't forget this fact: Radio is *only* a sound media... You have to understand this "only" as a positive thing, not a restriction. We welcome this "only".

This fact introduces a very interesting paradox, the aim of this reading: If Radio wants to become a new media, Radio will have to respect its traditional and particular sound communicative frame: to take advantage of its apparent disadvantage.

For example, Radio will have to reduce this effort for *showing*, *showing* rather than *telling*. Radio will have to slow down this marketing and strategic trend for putting always the sound in a graphic framework, as if Radio was a TV channel in a webpage. Radio has to work in *telling*, telling with sounds, and not in *showing* with digital pictures in a webpage... That is not to say that, afterwards, thanks to the imagination, maybe these sounds could become mental images, as fascinating as the pictures we can watch on TV.

We have to remember...

Radio has been about to die since the 70s. It has been an unavoidable topic. Everybody talks about the death of Radio every year. And Radio, in search of a new identity, has been able to survive this announced death.

Remember the big challenge the identity of Radio faced *versus* TV in the seventies. Radio became a media specialized in news, talk-shows and

music... and lost its role of radio-show. The quiz-shows and fiction programs lost the battle of time in the radio-grill in favour of TV. Today, TV is still the main media for the quiz-shows and fiction.

When in the nineties TV took a big step with the reality-shows, as a good format to take advantage of the economic crisis... Radio didn't react. Radio lost its role of music-box in front of the Internet. At the same time, economic crisis forced to the music record companies to a big internal reorganization. The golden age of the big music record companies was over. In order to understand the power of Radio, we have to remember, that Radio had been the "military wing" of the music industry.

What Radio did in the nineties was to reinforce its star-system programming, with very popular radio-hosts, and more hours for the timeliness: public events, news, interviews, talk-shows, political talking-shops (our Spanish "tertulias") and late-night shows inviting telephone callers to talk about private secrets.

In Spain, the stereotyped image of a radio-host isn't a showman or a showwoman, or a disc-jockey... The stereotype representation of a radio-host is a journalist: a journalist who broadcasts news (soft news and breaking news), who interviews political and cultural celebrities... three, four or six hours every day.

Even, when TV has become a talking-media, with programs with a lot of people talking and talking around a table, Radio didn't take advantage of this influence: because a part of TV-grill is today Radio on TV. Radio lost in the 90s the opportunity of claiming its reference position as the main sound media: the TV star-system was born in Radio, and this TV star-system is doing Radio on TV. And not only that: TV cameras went into the Radio studios, showing a TV audience how a Radio program is done. Maybe, Radio programmers were thinking that: if radio audience can watch radio, this media will be better... They forgot, the best thing Radio has, so far, is his invisibility. In the invisibility lays the difference....

Only from the shadows, talking to invisible audiences, telling a story, exploring new worlds in our imagination... Radio has become a specific and a very personal media.

As we are not able to watch... we are able to listen to the sounds much better. This fact, in perception psychology, should be the first motto in Radio programming. Only from the shadows, Radio will become a new media, in this searching for a new identity in our sound-sphere, avoiding to

be absorbed by other media. Only from the shadows, Radio will continue enjoying its significant difference... and won't die as a media.

And now, in the era of new media, once more people talk about the death of Radio. But Radio isn't dead. And not only because ECREA and *Universidade do Minho* has succeeded in gathering almost 200 radio researchers (which is a fairly important reason).... but... because Radio is still a very popular media.

As we are here talking about Radio, several million people all over the world are listening to the radio, as they usually do. They are tuning in to a radio station because listening to the radio is a day-to-day habit, deeply anchored in our lives... Listening to the radio as usual... like breathing?... Listening to the radio like eating?... like driving the car?... Almost the same, for millions of people all over the world.

Maybe, the problem began when the multimedia companies, with newspapers, TV-channels and radio-stations, stopped believing in the power of Radio. For them, Radio was only a complementary media, in the big network of economic interests between advertising and audiences. In the search of audience and advertising, Radio is *only* a complementary media.

The first thing Radio operators have to do, is to reconize the power of the sound. Despite the seduction and persuading power of the image in a TV-set or in a digital device, the sound has a big power, too:

-Imagine the spirit of our young people without music. The music sound is essential for living, for many people.

-Imagine the persuading power of a TV advertising film, without music or voices.

Could you imagine a world without a sound-box?...

So, Radio can be the sound-box of the future. Maybe, not a Radio as we understand this media today, but indeed, a Radio with a better audience orientation with a first class value sound.

My research group in *Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona*, Publi-radio, has studied what happens with this audience out of the measure system: the audience below 14 years old, for example... the children.... There is a big gap.

It's an audience invisible, excluded... who listens to the radio in the family car, at the school or by the mobil phone... or, while they are doing the homeworks at home. This is an audience who has the radio listening habit as a normal thing... It's possible that this young audience sometimes ignores that the sound they are listening in their earphones comes from a radio station.... But this audience is an audience fascinated by the power of the sound... the sound of music, the most of the times, that's right, but the sound of the voice, too... A lot of listeners, and a lot of young listeners, would feel fascinated by the voice of the radio-actor Constantino Romero, telling the end of *War of the Worlds*, for exemple, in the Orson Welles' radiobroadcasting. The Constantino Romero's voice and the Orson Welles' genius as a storyteller is a guaranteed success.

So, where is the problem? The problem is...

Number one: The sound-sphere which surrounds to the young audience isn't understood as a Radio media. The sound which people listens by the earphones is only "music"... or "spoken word books"... or the sound of TV (a TV we don't watch, because our eyes are looking at other pictures).... Or anything else... A lot of young people, maybe, listened to a radio broadcasting version of *War of the Worlds* in the Internet without knowing that is Radio³. All the Radio needs, is to know how to improve, its corporated image as the main sound reference among the media.

Problem number two: Radio has resigned from its rol as a sound's media reference: a) destroying Fiction Departments, which were one of the most efficient and cheaper sources of Entertainment sounds; b) transferring its rol of music-box to the Internet... The main music-box now is our computer or a similar device connected to the Internet.

Maybe, what is about to die is the "radio-set", or the tradicional way of listening to the Radio in a "radio receiver". Radio is now, in a technological environment more sophisticated. So far, We imagine Radio like a voice inside a box... This idea, this image, is over for young people... The sound doesn't come from a box anymore, although this small box is an *e-book*, for exemple... The sound is inside, inside ourselves... not out of ourselves... because the electronic ears have become the new natural

³ I produced a spanish version of *War of the Worlds* in 1988 for the *Cadena SER*, with the radio-actor Constantino Romero in the main rol.

ears... All the Radio needs, is to know how to turn the attention light on, and how to connect to the new listeners, with sounds, with sound stories well told.

Problem number three: Radio, in the new technological environment, will have to work with a new communicative framework: The new audiences, have shown the crisis of the mediation. The legitimacy of media is based on this rule: a media is a mediation channel between the reality and the audience. But now, a new audience, the digital audience, fascinated by the magic question of the interactivity in the Internet, would like a communication without the media mediation. This new audience, for example, in a theatre, enjoy being in the “stalls” and in the “stage” at the same time... would enjoy “watching” and “being watched”... would enjoy being “audience” and “speaker”... This new audience thinks, the traditional media’s mediation isn’t necessary.

We have to understand the future of Radio around a new listener who would like to be the center of the communication...

All the Radio needs, is to know how to plan new formats focusing on how to fight against this mediation crisis. That’s right, but taking into account, at the same time, that Radio has to be much more than a channel, for the listeners communication among themselves in radio talk shows, or much more than a channel, for broadcasting public service news. The radiophonic language will always need good storytellers, trained in the art of telling a story with sounds for an invisible audience. Radio needs an artistic domain, if the Radio wants to be something more than a music-box or a word-box....

Well, let’s go back to the beginning. Sometimes, it’s important to go back to the beginning. In the beginning there was the sound. The sound in caves, when man hit stones with bones... listening to the sound of his own voice, amplified by the reverberance of the cave... Man, knew the power of the sound since the beginning, and before the beginning: listening to the voice of his mother even before being born... You see: the sound has been our companion since the very beginning.

What man has been looking-for since the beginning, is how to make instruments to produce sounds, or instruments for sending this sounds to long distances... That is how Radio was born.

Radio has sense because is a media which helps us to hear our own voices, the voices of our environment, the sound of our emotions... The human

need to listen is the best reason to justify the need for Radio. So, I think Radio, as the best soundscape of our society, will never disappear...

The unforgiving march of time, our unkind friend in Radio, reminds me that the time of this reading is over. Thank you, very much. *Muito obrigado.*