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CHILDREN'S RADIO: SONOROUS GAMES AND BINDING ENVIRONMENTS

ABSTRACT

This paper presents two children's programs currently aired in Brazil, namely the program *Para Ouvir e Aprender* broadcasted by Radio Rural of Santarém, Pará; the program *Rádio Maluca* broadcasted live from the auditorium on Saturdays on Radio MEC of Rio de Janeiro. Both programs are studied as examples of Brazil's cultural diversity, with children playing on the radio in big cities like Rio de Janeiro and communities on the outskirts of Santarém. The goal is to observe how do children play in these radio programs, analyzing to what extent the programs make use of radio elements in a playful way, or if the plays on the radio are actually one mimicking the adult world. Thus, it is possible to critically examine ways of production of radio content for children, thinking the effective participation of them in the construction of knowledge and the bond with listeners. It is believed that this study reinforces the need to discuss and debate the future of radio, not only in its technological aspects, but also to ensure that its greatest benefit is preserved: the culture of listening.

KEYWORDS

Children's radio; culture of listening; sound games; environments

INTRODUCTION

At the time when there is much discussion about the future of radio, few efforts to plan and produce content of programs aimed at children. The segmentation of the radio audience has almost decreed the end of the child participation in radio content. In Brazil, the few children's productions are restricted to public broadcasters or educative media.

In 1988, Doris Fagundes Haussen has researched in her Master's thesis why radio stations did not invest in content for children's productions.

The author interviewed journalists, broadcasters and advertisers, mapping the perceptions of the radio market for this type of programming. Journalists and producers complain about the lack of interest from the advertising on radio products aimed at children, while advertisers claim that the children's productions fall short in return in audience, harming the financial investment. Through research with children in the form of questionnaire, Haussen exposed the great radio lag in relation to the children's TV habits:

It is interesting to note at the outset that, in general, to answer questions on the radio, children maintained an attitude that can be called "regular", but once you get to the items on the TV virtually their faces lit up, clearly demonstrating its higher affinity for this communication vehicle. (Haussen, 1988, p. 105)

To carry forward the discussion on the lack of interest of children in radio programs, a deeper view of the essence of hearing as corporeality is required. The issues raised in this article may not be treated as an assessment of qualification of the audience, not as a set of perceptions of children to the material presented. What is at stake is the effective participation of children in construction (or dismantling) of radio programs; what can be achieved by recreational operations caused by sounds from children's programs. It is, therefore, a study of the ontogeny of the hearing, from the early stages of body, sensory and cognitive constitution of children, until the sound games that are part of the radio productions for children. This understanding of childhood forms of the hearing and the children's game as dismantling of traditional radio features is fundamental to the debate on the future of radio productions. In an age of saturation of media images (Baitello Junior, 2005; 2010), the children's game can be the exit to the return of the corporeality in the media.

It starts from the principle that radio programs are drawn up from the linear construction of narratives composed by the speaker's voice, soundtracks and musical effects that make up the radio syntax (Silva, 1999). This model is the result of development to the radio over the decades; programming grids, trading blocs, sponsorships, listener participation, sports and news conferences of working papers are just a few of the shapes that characterize the radio as a means of social communication and synchronization. The radio instrumentalization therefore complies with the promise of an informed society, organized and prepared to progress. For that reason, the radio fails to perform to its fullest function of means of sonic experimentation and collective construction of knowledge. Added to

this problem, the fact that the radio directly competes with television for the attention of consumers, including “Junior” consumers.

These observations were part of the PhD research entitled *Rádio brincadeira: jogos sonoros e as performances do corpo nos programas infantis (Radio as a play: playing with sounds and the body performances in children programs)*, presented in June 2014 at the Pontifícia Universidade de São Paulo, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Norval Baitello Junior. The purpose of this paper is to reverberate the provocations launched by that research and the debates arising from the arguments of the examination board. The corpus comprises two programs: *Para Ouvir e Aprender*, which is part of the “Rádio para Educação”, linked to UNICEF. It has an educational approach; the program is heard in classrooms and plays the role of connecting students and teachers of the community of Santarém area, by means of local events coverage and by reading letters written by students from various schools in the region. Also the program *Radio Maluca* presented by Zé Zezuca, who invites listeners to do the program through “radio holes”. Both children in the auditorium of Rádio Nacional and those that are on the other side of the apparatus are encouraged to play with their imagination. For instance, the opening phrase of the program is “It is entering the air to confuse your noggin, the Rádio Maluca (The crazy radio)”. The term “confuse the noggin” is fundamental to the understanding of child participation on the radio.

The observations and analyzes of the above programs take into account the importance of an anthropological look at the sound performances on the radio. Such performances are, notably, not just results of verbal actions, but make up a whole series of corporealities ranging from making sounds through instruments – or the body’s own – to handling of pens and papers that link students and teachers, listeners and speakers in a real performative orchestra¹, expanding the possibilities of linking and learning of children through children’s radio programs.

RÁDIO MALUCA [CRAZY RADIO]

The program *Rádio Maluca* airs on Rádio MEC AM Rio de Janeiro on Saturday mornings. It is presented by the actor Zé Zezuca and it makes up the last hour of the *Estação Brincadeira* program. The presentation is live from 11 am to noon, usually at the auditorium of Rádio Nacional. Because

¹ The term “orchestral communication” (comunicação orquestral) was proposed by the Belgian anthropologist Yves Winkin in the book *A Nova Comunicação* (1998).

of the reform of the old newspaper building *A Noite*, where is located the auditorium of Rádio Nacional, the programs have been presented in alternative venues such as theaters and bookshops.

The program's opening song announces the play that comes sneaky in the radio, with a provocative tone, in an attempt to move the child's body and senses from the very beginning of the program. Ears, eyes and skin are connected to the presenters' through "radio holes". The comical and provocative voice announces:

From 'Auditório da Nacional', or maybe from a mouse hole. Getting in through the microphone wire, slowly approaching, through the backwards of your radio. Now on air, to confuse your noggin, *the Rádio Maluca!*

Lots of songs are played to keep that atmosphere on and to encourage the children to participate all the time.

The theater stage is decorated with percussion instruments, props like rubber chickens and cloth scraps. Alongside Zé Zezuca, the guitar player Mariano is handling his instrument. The duo of presenters invites children to participate in the program through the holes of the speaker, saying that *Rádio Maluca* is the "program that you see on the radio". Thus, children are encouraged in their imagination to work on creating endogenous images. These images are full of emotional memories of the children, are the result of a learning body, in addition to purely mental activities. As stated by the presenter himself:

Rádio Maluca is the program you see on the radio. So we do a program on the radio, but a full picture program, visual. *Rádio Maluca* has a scenery. We joke that you can see things that are happening in the program by the holes of your radio. So you have all this stuff to exercise the child's imagination. We do not use teaching apparatus, but the program, first of all, is a program for fun. But it has much cultural content that can be used by educators, parents with children, but above all by the children themselves.²

Child participation goes beyond the information flow indicators, the interactivity of telegraphic communication – emitter, channel, receiver – when Zé Zezuca decorates the stage and fills it with music so children can observe the radio through its little holes. This is how the program "boggles

² Video interview posted on the Brazilian Company of Communication site - EBC. Retrieved from <http://www.ebc.com.br/infantil/para-pais/2014/08/programa-infantil-de-radio-completa-10-anos>.

the noggin” of junior listeners, causing the body to reverberate the games of the stage in the living room, looking for colours, textures and sounds to complete the images proposed by the presenters.

Such sound performances on radio were analyzed by José Eugenio de Oliveira Menezes (2007) from the notion of “sound transits”, with regard to sound images passing by technical devices, reconnecting two environments and linking the bodies. The sounds games on *Rádio Maluca* connect children through the sound stage performances transiting the speakers and spread throughout the listening environment, vibrating on the skin and ears of children looking to see “the radio holes”. Rádio MEC AM and Rádio Nacional become therefore extensions of all performance experienced in the auditorium. Children are led by the protagonist Zé Zezuka that after the greetings, launches the question: “do you know who I am?”

I am the one who speaks by singing / I am the one who
plays all the time / I will invite you to play, lalalah / I am Ze,
your friend Ze Zezuka...

The words *Zezuka*, *maluca* (crazy) e *cuca* (noggin) play and rhyme in the musical rhythm of the show's opening. Such sonic game not only facilitates the child's attention and memory, as stimulates the sensory work of their body, in their five senses, in the play; whether they are in the auditorium or listening to the radio.

Next, there are two examples of the program that demonstrate the need to think children's radio less narratively and more tangibly. The first example shows a moment of the program in which the presenter gives the microphone to children, bringing up the unpredictability of children's games. The provocation to children is not only narrative but messes with the whole body, which runs, hides, jumps and prepares the most unexpected responses to the presenter's questions. The second example, however, points to a corporal performance of the imagination of a child who played at being a fairy, but the radio transmission was not able to capture and incorporate the program.

EU VOU TE PROVOCAR [I WILL TEASE YOU]

In this context children really begin to participate in the program. In each episode it is proposed a topic to be debated in theater spaces. Zé Zezuka downs the stage and interact with the children, taking the microphone to groups that have formed between the seats and the stage. At this time, many of the children are no longer in their seats; some of them runs

towards the host, other shrink in their own shyness and seek protection in the bodies of their parents. Zezuca points the microphone for children, those seeking more agile; sometimes follows a logical order the rows of the theater. But always causing a stir among the children. It is clear that provocation is not restricted to the topic and a simple answer, but it is a body set, like a game of "catch". The space between the stage and the seating is overrun by kids trying to arrive first at the host, as in a game of *Agon*, or competition in the Roger Callois classification (1990), eager to participate in the game that consists of answering questions in microphone.

The questions usually refer to preferences or perceptions, for instance: do you have a pet at home? What can you see from your window? What is your favorite food? Who presents the theme of the day and interaction channels is the called "voice of production". That is the moment when the responsible for program production enters off, so the children cannot see him. This voice calls children who are listening to the program to participate by telephone, e-mail or the program page on the Facebook social network. At the end of the program some gifts are drawn to the listeners such as books or CDs.

For instance, one of the topics was the Brazilian folklore, so the provocation of the day was which character of folklore does the child like the most. Antonio, 6-year-old replied *Saci Pererê*, as Jean Luca and Cauã, both 4 years, answered *Mula-sem-Cabeça*. Another character, *Cuca*, was also cited by Barbara, a 10 year-old girl. At the end of the questions, Zezuca asks Mariano his favorite character: he said he likes Saci most, because it steals food of people homes. But Mariano, said Zezuca, you only think about food!

ON STAGE: TELLING STORIES AND DRESSING UP

In one of the visits to the auditorium of Rádio Nacional, my early arrival to Rio de Janeiro allowed for closer monitoring of the assembly process of the stage and rehearsing with children. On that day the storyteller woman made her performance with the help of a child audience. A girl about five years old, dressed in a fairy costume was chosen. The storyteller brought a suitcase full of toys that serve as support for the story of *Dona Baratinha* (*Lady Cockroach*). During the rehearsal with an empty audience, after opening the case, the storyteller gave an animal toy to the child, saying it wanted to marry *Dona Baratinha*. The girl was supposed to imitate the sound of the animal she had in hand, so that *Dona Baratinha* be frightened by the sound and give up marrying each animal. But already during the rehearsal the little

fairy churned the stage, giving to the horse in her hands the power to fly. Despite of the storyteller's attempts to keep the girl close to the microphone, the little fairy led the plastic horse through the air, preventing the continuation of the story that unfolded in front of the stage.

This small event is important to realize the difficulty of an adult in bringing the child to the performance dramatically scheduled. The fantasy was already happening at that moment in the child's head, but did not agree with the proposal of the storyteller. In her gestures, the girl revealed usual rituals in our culture: horses can fly, as there are many winged horses in children's stories; the very princess costume the child was dressing puts her mimetically into a fantastic universe where it would be perfectly acceptable to use a flying horse on her mental stories.

PARA OUVIR E APRENDER [TO LISTEN AND LEARN]

Another example of children's program on traditional radio is *Para Ouvir e Aprender*, linked to the "Radio for Education Project"³. The program is part of a teaching methodology that involves the development of teaching materials, teacher training for the use of radio program in the classroom and program production in partnership with teachers and students.

For thirty minutes the program leads to the classroom 14 alternate sessions, which include the reality of the Amazon, the voice of children and adolescents, teachers / and the community / as the urban and rural areas. All sessions stimulate the reading of text genres present in school and in society (books, posters, stories, radio, television, newspaper, etc.)⁴

The program is aired on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in the morning and evening period, in Rádio Rural of Santarém in Pará. This station is linked to the Diocese of Santarém, through its Ministry of Communication.

The thirty minutes program follows some traditional forms of gender varieties such as newsletters, reading listeners' letters, special reports, cultural agenda, among others. The narration is done by adults and children,

³ Created in 1999, it works as a space project developments aimed at educational communication in Para schools, especially in Santarém and region. In partnership with the Santarém City Hall and the Diocese of Santarém, the PRPE receives support from UNICEF, the Child Project Hope and the Bank of Brazil Foundation. The PRPE has a blog on www.radiopelaeducacao.blogspot.com.br.

⁴ See www.radiopelaeducacao.blogspot.com.br/p/o-que-e-o-projeto-radio-pela-educacao_4771.html

and adults are usually represented by the teacher figure. Although it follows a classic radio aesthetics, the program appears as an extension of the classroom, or a link between the family, the church and the school. Stands out to this reflection the direct participation of junior listeners, by sending letters to the radio.

CORREIO DO ALUNO [STUDENT MAIL]

It is the time when the announcers read the letters sent by children from schools in communities near Santarém. Remarkable sonic bonds are present in the section of correspondence between listeners and the program. Many of the children who hear and participate in the program live in remote villages of Santarém. They write letters with the help of their teachers and usually praise the program, the speakers and the school where they study. Usually send hugs and kisses to classmates, the teacher and parents.

This applies to a student of the 4th year of Rotary School that says she likes the program and her teacher. Sends hugs to officials and school friends and also to her parents and brothers. From the community of Peixuna in Tapará, a student of 7th grade in the School Nossa Senhora Aparecida said hello to teachers and classmates, naming everyone, and parents. In brief reading of the letter from Raiana 12-year-old, 7th grade, the announcers intone: "if I was a rose bush I would give you a flower, as I am listening to you I give a hello."

Students at São Domingos School, from the Community Nova Sociedade in Rio Arapinhus "write with great pleasure to the program to send a hello to teachers and friends", as in the case of the student Carina Lopes. The student Maria Vanderlaine, 12 year-old, writes for the first time and thinks the program is a wonder; sends hugs to colleagues, citing their names, parents and grandparents, and ends with the little poem: "I wrote in a white rose 'radio for education'. A bird came and said 'write it on your heart'".

Students of Santarém region communities are effective participants of the program, strengthening their family and affective bonds through the letters read live by the presenters. These are links that permeate the media primary, secondary and tertiary, the bodies of the students in connection with their colleagues in play school, contact teachers, which is encoded in hugs written on paper and sent to the Radio broadcaster, so they can be read and irradiated by electromagnetic waves back to the villages, closing a cycle of belonging that goes beyond the limits of the walls of houses, schools, cities and broadcaster. The little girl Raiana and other children has

devoted a lifetime to sit next to the teacher and together they wrote a letter to colleagues, parents and especially strengthened the links between them, recording in graphics and audio signals the moments lived together in the classroom.

FINAL PLAY

The examples presented are a sample of the current Brazilian radio productions for children. Educational or purely playful character, directed to the public of the Amazon or Rio de Janeiro, which are observed are possibilities of use of radio programs as a way to link children through play, whether they are side by side with the producer or listening to the radio. More than convey narrative, the radio works as sonic experimentation environment, as a way to rescue in the children the culture of listening with the whole body. Learning on the radio is not limited to technical knowledge, but the ability to learn with the whole body. Currently learning is less and less related to the experiences of the body, but the constant exposure to the visual arts. So it is not surprising that the radio productions are the result of contemporary social dynamics, which greatly devalue child development – experimentation – through all the senses.

The radio play also serve as a way to look critically at the *savoir faire* of radio, pointing out the shortcomings of a strictly linear language, submitted to dictatorship of timers (Schafer, 2008) and full of visual arts in their audio content. Playing, children dismantle the radio, turning information transmission environments in fancy sounds environments, masks and bonds.

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