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## INTRODUCTION

# RADIO, SOUND AND THE INTERNET IN A HARD OF HEARING SOCIETY

At odds with the idea that radio is an archaic and nostalgic medium, the Internet has been understood as a kind of new transistor. However more than an expanded form of wireless communication, the Web corresponds to a new age for radio and audio media. Born to be blind, or non-visual, for the first time radio has been seriously challenged by the empire of images. Due to its optical nature, the Internet has actually “forced” radio to become visible, given that there is no other way to tune in a radio broadcaster on the Internet than “navigating through” icons. Although more visibility usually means less capacity to listen to something, the Internet has also brought new forms of listening to. Podcasts and audio on demand are today a sophisticated, but absolutely simple, way of providing listeners with new audio productions. Corresponding to a new way of listening to radio and a new paradigm of audio content distribution, as acknowledged by Ignacio Gallego (2010), podcasting represents one of the most innovative audio services provided by Internet. Adapted both to information and fiction/entertainment, this format changed the way radio has always been regarded. If in the past it was exclusively dedicated to live broadcast, which meant that audience and broadcast were simultaneous, today radio is, likewise other mainstream media, a platform of customized content.

There is probably no evidence that today we are listening to radio or any other audio production more than we did before. Probably we are not. Although modernity can be defined as noisy (Hendy, 2013), our culture has been much more visual than aural. In an article on the relationship between images and words, published in *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal, Anabela Gradim recalls that “the invention of mass media, and then of the audiovisual, disseminated at a planetary scale the image culture which is today modelling the perception of the world” (Gradim, 2007, p. 190). This

may even explain why there seems to be more confidence in what can be seen than in what is heard. The history of media and communication has therefore led us to a hard of hearing society, which affects not only our connection to the world but more intimately our interpersonal relationships.

Discussing whether the future Internet is promising (or not) to the radio and audio media is today one of the most relevant and complex research themes in this sector. It consists in questioning technological progress, audience practices and uses, narrative strategies, business models, and aesthetic trends. In all such dimensions, it implies a deeper sociological approach to the listening sense and therefore the role sound plays for the understanding of the world. To a certain extent this was the general goal of the project “Net Station: shaping radio for Web environment”. By inquiring the reconfiguration of radio on the Internet and the place of acoustic languages in cyberspace, this project was aimed at recentering the scientific debate on the relevance of sound within contemporary societies, usually reduced to the visual culture perspective.

Three main conclusions of this project inspired the invitation for the Net Station International Conference which took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April 2015, at the University of Minho, Braga (Portugal): 1) there is no doubt that radio invested in its adaptation to the Web, but multimedia resources are still underdeveloped on radios’ websites as audio is not particularly ‘visible’ neither on websites nor on apps and social networks; 2) there seems to be a complementariness between traditional radio and radio on the Internet in terms of uses, because Internet users who access radio websites state they access their preferred FM radio too, as explained in detail by Pedro Portela in his PhD dissertation (Portela, 2015); 3) the Internet demands the reconfiguration of radio language but it is also a powerful platform to stimulate sound production, to promote listening literacy and to draw attention to the requalification of our listening sense.

Funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), Net Station project (Ref. PTDC/CCI-COM/122384/2010) ended, as a formal project, in April 2015. However, the lively debate generated during the Net Station International Conference demonstrated that radio, sound and the Internet is an auspicious thematic triangle to keep believing audio media are not lifeless. As Lance Dann defended during the closing conference of this two-day scientific event, “media do not die; they transform”.

Although radio and audio studies have a relatively modest tradition within communication sciences (especially when compared with other scientific areas), there seems to be an increasing interest for sound and

acoustic languages in academia. It was this growing community of researchers conducting investigation in this area that attended the final conference of Net Station project. A small but warm group of 55 participants coming from 11 countries discussed with the research team the outcomes of a three-year research plan and enriched the scientific programme of this event with eight parallel sessions. Contributions came from Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Germany, France, Poland, Brazil, Bulgaria, Romania, Austria and UK. Participants were invited to make their presentations in English, but, in a very integrative strategy, Spanish and Portuguese were also admitted languages.

Editors are aware that three editorial options may compromise the scientific quality of this publication. First, the combination of chapters in three different languages (English, Portuguese and Spanish), which will probably cause some difficulties for some readers, especially for those who do not know the Iberian languages. Then the policy of publishing all submitted full papers without specific peer-reviewing. The 30 papers integrating this book were analysed only by the editors. However, as this book was meant to broaden the debates that animated the parallel sessions, all contributions were accepted. Finally, for budgetary reasons, there was no professional proofreading nor linguistic review of the papers written in English. Some of them were written by non-native English speakers, thus they may have some language inaccuracies. For these motives, reading this book (or parts of it) may require “turning a blind eye” to some impreciseness. We hope it does not sound too useless<sup>1</sup>.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Linguistic review of João Paulo Abreu Silva, in the scope of the project “Net Station: shaping radio for Web environment (PTDC/CCI-COM/122384), funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology and by structural funds COMPETE and QREN.