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## SOUND AESTHETICS IN FERNANDO CURADO RIBEIRO

### ABSTRACT

After giving up on an engineering degree, Fernando Curado Ribeiro (1919-1995) started his career as a singer and joined Emissora Nacional as an announcer. Later, he was an announcer for radio stations in Angola, the former Belgian-Congo, Belgium, France and Great-Britain, he was a sound editor, radio producer and director, in particular of *Leitura*, a programme for literary promotion. Ribeiro also gave a boost to radio theatre, translated and adapted plays, represented and directed actors, along with his other passions in the cultural and creative industries: cinema (*O Costa do Castelo*, *Menina da Rádio*, *O Leão da Estrela*) and stage theatre, as an actor in the cast of Teatro Nacional (Portuguese National Theatre) (Raimundo, 2005). In terms of books, he published *Diário duma Voz. Inconfidências, Críticas, Programas, Entrevistas* (1947) and *Rádio. Produção, Realização, Estética* (1964). In the latter, he proposed: We will study what is assumed to be the preparation of professionals who are involved in the making of Radio Art. And we will create, whenever possible, new angles or unusual aspects in radio-production and its problems, in an effort to enable a direct or indirect study of the new radio aesthetics (Ribeiro, 1964, pp. 8-9).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the main points of the book published in 1964, especially those related to sound aesthetics and the links with works on radio published internationally which influenced his writing. Fernando Curado Ribeiro's internships in Brussels and in Paris were essential to understand the book. The theoretical and practical weight of his book is quite obvious when compared with French texts identified further on. To arrive here, I asked the following questions: what is the scope of the theoretical field? Which are the central elements in his aesthetics? Which radio genres were more important in his work?

### KEYWORDS

Curado Ribeiro; announcer; sound aesthetics; book; radio

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## **ELEMENTS OF CURADO RIBEIRO'S PROFESSIONAL AND AESTHETIC PATH**

By not including Portuguese authors who had already written about the radio but who belonged to the regime (Pires, 1941; Ferro, 1950; Álvares, 1954), when Arcádia published his book in 1964, Curado Ribeiro revealed a strong independence in relation to the Salazarist culture. On the contrary, whenever he wrote about aesthetics, he mentioned Portuguese authors who were not identified with Estado Novo (Francisco Vieira de Almeida, João José Cochofel and José Fonseca e Costa), besides mentioning the Marxist Georgi Plekhanov.

When comparing his choices of what was to be written versus what wasn't to be written, I try to understand his reasons. Joana Campina, Curado Ribeiro's wife, had been fired from Emissora Nacional for signing lists of the political opposition in 1948. Curado Ribeiro himself had started his radio activity at Emissora Nacional, but he moved to Rádio Clube Português, because he disagreed with the positions taken by that radio station. The couple went to work in Angola, searching for opportunities. After some professional experiences in Africa and in Europe, Curado Ribeiro brought with him a more professional vision of the media, of which resulted the programme *Leitura, Semanário Radiofónico de Divulgação Literária*, produced for 20 years at Rádio Clube Português, in more than a thousand broadcasts. In this programme, he presented new books, interviewed authors, read and dramatized scenes of books and spoke about international editions.

In the year that the book was published Fernando Curado Ribeiro was deeply involved in radio. In 1963, he was making a night programme at Rádio Clube Português, together with António Miguel. Stage theatre once again called his attention. The edition of *Rádio. Produção, Realização, Estética*, germinating in his mind since his arrival from the Brussels and Paris' internships, would be delayed due to his several occupations.

## **FRENCH INFLUENCES**

In his 1964 book, Fernando Curado Ribeiro clearly identified French authors who were involved in radio after the country's liberation at the end of World War II (Sudre, 1945; Thévenot, 1946; Cordier, 1950; Pradalié, 1951). At that moment and in France, the radio promoted the will to regenerate society, thanks to the broad reach of its message in the communities and the families.

A central theme among the authors under analysis is the idea of *blind radio* (Pradalié, 1951, p. 116; Thévenot, 1946, p. 44), an idea resumed by Curado Ribeiro and still studied today (Chignell, 2009, pp. 67-71). In Curado Ribeiro (1964, p. 148), verbal communication implies two participants – the one who speaks and the one who listens. Thus, in that verbal communication, there is a double presence, whereas “on the radio, there is a double absence: the person who speaks does not see the one who listens; the person who listens does not see the one who speaks”. Although extracted from one of his literary influences, it is still an elegant image. The listener cannot see who is speaking on the radio, but the tone of the voice makes him want to get acquainted with the owner of that voice. Besides, the radio does not mobilise all of the listener’s activities (contrary to cinema, television and theatre), freeing him to do other tasks. For Thévenot (1946, pp. 57-58), listening is an exceptional state of receptivity and emotion, which lets the listener travel in time and space.

Roger Pradalié (1951) may have been Curado Ribeiro’s most influential French author, essential to the three-part structure of his book. Pradalié emphasizes radio production (70 pages), while Curado Ribeiro uses 50 pages to develop the same topic, also adding elements from the third part of Pradalié’s book. The second part of radio broadcasting in Fernando Curado Ribeiro delves into issues included in the second part of Pradalié’s book. In the third part of Fernando Curado Ribeiro’s book, the first chapter is called “Cânones da Estética Radiofónica” (The Canons of Radio Aesthetics), the exact title of the third part of Pradalié’s book.

Of the radio genres, Thévenot (1946) distinguished reporting, based on immediacy. As for Cordier (1950, p. 60), he mapped the main radio genres (news, education, professional, artistic and recreational), hallmarks of an era that placed its hopes on the social harmony brought about by the radio. On the other hand, Sudre (1945, p. 71) and Pradalié (1951, p. 103) highlighted news or *spoken news*. Historically speaking, relaying the news was the first role of the radio, in the form of bulletins (weather reports, stock market), specialised magazines, chronicles, press reviews, and roundtables.

Theatre plays and concerts, especially the variety show and those outside the studio, were part of the programming. Since 1937, variety shows were financed through advertising and obeyed to popular demand, filling the majority of the private radio stations’ programmes, which encouraged composers and songwriters to write popular music (Pradalié, 1951, p. 36). Pradalié (1951, pp. 104-105) included propaganda and advertising, both seen as being effective on the radio. Thus, still with no competition from

television, prime time for radio listening was from 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm for the news report and variety programmes, from 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm for classical music and from 12:30 pm to 2:00 pm for a broader range of music. In the middle of the broadcast, the announcer would show up as a star, while at the same time theatre stars, journalists, and reporters, those whom I called *radio voices* (Santos, 2005) were distinguished as well.

Another book which profoundly influenced Curado Ribeiro was that of Sudre (1945). The initial text of the work, entitled “Excerto de uma carta a um recetor amigo” (Extract of a letter to a friendly receptor) (Ribeiro, 1964, pp. 11-15) is structurally similar to the beginning of Sudre’s book (1945, pp. 7-12), entitled “Épître à mon récepteur”. While Sudre (1945) and Pradalié (1951) had a more technological narrative, Curado Ribeiro’s (1964) prose was more literary, although with no academic references, usually found in today’s books. Curado Ribeiro was not an academic but a man of action in the radio industry. In thought, Curado Ribeiro was closer to Jean Thévenot (1946), who also made radio programmes, more than Pradalié (1951), who was a director of the French public radio station and more active in the organization and management of the station, and Sutre (1945), a journalist, writer, and contributor at Radiodiffusion Française (1926-1940) (Hill, 2013, p. 135).

The least influential book for Curado Ribeiro’s work was that of Stéphane Cordier (1950), although he worked two ideas that were central in the other books which greatly influenced Curado Ribeiro. On the one hand, the radio is geared simultaneously towards a large audience and a single listener (Cordier, 1950, p. 93), which Curado Ribeiro repeats (1964, p. 54). It was a time when the memory of collective listening was still present, due to the shortage of receptors and its high cost. Meanwhile, every family bought a receptor, listening to it in the living room, without interruptions. On the other hand, Cordier looks at sounds from three essential elements: word, noises (sound effects) and music.

Although almost a decade elapsed between the publication of the French books and Curado Ribeiro’s text, I believe there is a very close discourse and theoretical construction. Curado Ribeiro’s text is not very technical, even though he was a former student of Instituto Superior Técnico and Instituto Superior de Engenharia. The book’s graphic notation evidences the influences of the French texts. On the one hand, it shows sentences in italics, which refer to French authors read by Ribeiro, although he does not identify them. The italics have the same function as do the quotation marks in today’s academic texts. On the other hand, he uses footnotes, with specific cases which show the knowledge he acquired during his internships in

Brussels and Paris. He probably met the authors he quotes or heard about them from people he was close to during his internships. That gave him a perception of the work between Portugal and European countries that were culturally more developed, without differences in terms of speech quality, as he said in a radio interview:

I must say that those radio professionals who, at that time, were coming into the trade, were all [equal to] the best. I remember, for example, they always spoke of an excellent announcer, [Fernando] Pessa. When we went to London, they would say: “we have a very good foreign announcer. I don’t know if he comes from your country, his name is Pessa”. [...] Francisco Mata, who had a short career as an announcer, in fact, he didn’t distinguish himself as an announcer, was considered in Paris, where I worked with him, one of the best professionals at UNESCO. He was working at UNESCO at the time. (interview given to Luís Garlito on 6 June 1991, RTP archive)

## RADIO DRAMA

Radio drama was very prominent in Curado Ribeiro’s book (30 pages in length) and so was the analysis and reproduction of the play *Maremoto (Tsunami)* (see further on). I will make references to French authors who also wrote on the subject and who provided Curado Ribeiro with some elements. Then I will move on to the chapter of the Portuguese author, who at one time belonged to the permanent cast of D. Maria II Theatre.

Pradalié (1951, pp. 56-88) presented different stages of the production of radio drama. In the first, *preparatory* stage, text, music and director perform core functions. During the *execution* phase, the actors perform on stage or in the studio. Since at the time there was only one listening channel (monophony), the soundtrack used depth to cover both dimensions. The author would equally emphasize *interpretation*, explaining the director’s effort to make the actors forget about the microphone. Free from the microphone and the text, the actor would rely on his own talent to interpret the character. The radio is, simultaneously, impersonal and intimate or confidential (Ribeiro, 1964, pp. 138). Paddy Scanell (2014), a contemporary author, emphasized such intimacy in front of the microphone, which creates confidence in the listener. Pradalié also defines the *final stage*, that of recording and mixing, when sound level becomes a delicate moment (between voice, music and sound effects).

Curado Ribeiro's option seems essential when he follows the dialogue of the radio play *Maremoto (Tsunami)*, by Pierre Cusi and Gabriel Germinet (1924). The play was forbidden in France after a rehearsal and the pressure of public opinion, but translated and aired in the United Kingdom in 1925 and broadcasted in France only in 1937 (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 103; Méadel, 1992, p. 78). For Curado Ribeiro, the French play marked the beginning of radio drama, well before *The War of the Worlds*, Orson Welles' hit in 1938, adapted from Herbert George Wells' novel. In 1938, Welles' radio adaptation had terrorized America, through an experience of mass psychology that demonstrated radio's power of suggestion. In *Maremoto*, which emphasized the sinking of a ship, the radio took centre stage (Méadel 1992, p. 77). Although Curado Ribeiro did not mention it, Matos Maia's Portuguese episode of the war of the Martians in 1958 (1996) was in the mind of the announcer and writer.

The chapter Curado Ribeiro dedicates to radio drama starts with a quote from Gabriel Germinet, one of the authors of *Maremoto*. He then separates two phases in the construction of radio drama, *preparation* and *execution*, which to me make more sense than Pradalié's three phases. The Portuguese author highlights the main elements of radio drama: text, music, special sound effects, interpretation and direction (Ribeiro, 1964, pp. 71-72) and makes a distinction between spoken word (voice) and written word (text). The voice or the study of the spoken voice implies that the professional, when on the microphone, has to use proper breathing, a controlled vocal emission, a clear, resonant tone, ease of articulation, and a good pronunciation and diction. The author's great educational effort is clear on his pages. He also believes that spoken vocal interpretation is the basis of professional work (announcer, lecturer, actor, reporter) and speaks of rules of phraseology (pauses, emphases).

According to Curado Ribeiro, when the radio began its activity, the solution of choosing stage plays and adapting them for the radio was adopted. A narrator was used to link all the moments of action. At the same time, sound designers were beginning to be recognized as professionals, for the sets, the gestures and other non-sounding elements needed to be presented to the listener. Through the sounds, the listener can thus "see" from afar (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 75). Later, in an interview, the author defended this "vision" by recalling the 1940's and 1950's fans:

At that time the radio had a much greater impact than television has today. And it also had that mystery that the radio still holds today. The listeners' imagination did the rest. [...] The radio cannot make use of the image. The listener

is always challenged to build an image that is necessary for his understanding. The radio stimulates. (interview given to Luís Garlito on 6 June 1991, RTP archive)

From a historical perspective, after the first phase of adapting stage plays, came another when plays were written specifically for the radio. That meant that, when the work was being prepared, text, editing and direction were done separately. However, the execution phase included rehearsals, sound emphasis, noises and special effects, music, interpretation and final editing (Ribeiro, 1964, pp. 78-95). Closely following Pradalié, the Portuguese author wrote:

An author shows to a director, a producer or a reading committee a play that has been completely written, where everything is foreseen, from the music to sound effects; sometimes an author is asked to write a specific play; other times, the producer or director are the authors. (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 77)

## **SOUND AESTHETICS**

The third part of Curado Ribeiro's book is completely dedicated to sound aesthetics, where the author includes the definition of canon, the application of aesthetics to the advertising and direction of radio drama. With regard to the canon of radio aesthetics, Curado Ribeiro followed Pradalié (1951, pp. 107-113). The French author drew attention to the fact that the voice of the announcer has to be efficient at the microphone. So, lecturers were prohibited from reading their texts when their voices were weak, being thus replaced by radio announcers. Big orchestras were also not convenient for the radio. Low harmonics should be eliminated from the voices, and also exclude rare words, uncalled-for comments and ironic tones. The broadcast of radio texts seem to be better interpreted than comic broadcasts, and Pradalié advised a maximum duration of ten minutes.

While examining the voice, Curado Ribeiro also made an analysis of technologies – the microphone and loudspeaker. The first does not distort the voice but enhances the rich voices and questions the poor ones, leading to a full fidelity of the human expression (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 191). Whereas with the loudspeaker, the world of sound was transformed and the habit of listening changed, and with that two principles were developed, density and clarity, not quite well explained in the text. For the author, hesitations,

pauses, repetitions, exclamations, irony and humour appear as elements of personality statement.

The author also reflected on advertising, for it is a key to the financial success of commercial radio. He highlights the impact advertising has on listeners with the sales of the products it advertises, without prejudice to the importance of market studies (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 209). Advertising wasn't just about aesthetics, it also had the available budget for a campaign. Curado Ribeiro saw the potential in linking the radio to aesthetics and the arts, basing himself on quotes from Marxist authors who inspire him to write about the radio artwork (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 228). For him, aesthetics would be some kind of corollary of the structure and conditions of radio production and exploitation. The chapter repeats previous ideas such as the special attention given to radio elements (voice, music, sound effects) but it also includes the idea of programming. The chapter doesn't always seem clear, perhaps because his knowledge of art was less structured. As one of its objectives, current events were a part of the radio programme *Leitura*, and he intersected older works about radio with more recent ones about aesthetics in his book, which were referred to in his programme.

A book reflects the time when it was published. In his book, the author defended the nationalization of the radio as a legitimate development, accepting that those responsible for programming would, directly or not, follow orders which would influence the aesthetic criterion, being able to exclude whatever lay outside the political interest. He stressed that "fact is important and cannot be forgotten when attempting to develop the bases of ideal radio aesthetics" (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 199). It is obvious here that the author made a concession to the then existing political framework.

Another point that followed the French authors' line of thought, such as Thévenot (1946), was that of criticising the specialized broadcasting system, which led to the negligence of the radio's great mission – that of developing the listener's taste, of educating him (Ribeiro, 1964, p. 200). Fernando Curado Ribeiro's text runs counter to his professional practice, such as the programme *Sintonia 63*, which was based on music listeners asked for.

## CONCLUSIONS

The French authors didn't analyse programmes, for their objective was to develop free public opinion and to solve some technical problems. Certainly they cared about the fundamental triangle (voice, music and sound



effects) and genres (news, theatre, concerts and variety shows, contests), but without referring to the broadcast of sporting events (Sudre briefly touched the subject). References to advertising are far from Paul Lazarsfeld's concerns, the Austrian-American mathematician and creator of polls who studied audiences in order to know their tastes and consumption profiles. The French perspective was a statist one, with less emphasis given to commercial radio. On this topic, Curado Ribeiro's position was less strict, although he placed emphasis on production, training and aesthetics (voice, music and sound effects).

While the influence of French authors on Curado Ribeiro is quite strong, which shows the impact that French culture had on Portugal at the time, his work has an undeniable cultural value. The author, who was a professional of the cultural and creative industries (theatre, music, cinema, radio, literature), combines thought and practice in a balanced way.

In the text I highlighted elements of Fernando Curado Ribeiro's professional path, the weight of radio drama on his career – while, at the same time, pursuing his activities as a film and stage actor – and on his writing. The main elements of the author's aesthetics are based on the appropriate intersection of theatre, music, special sound effects, performance and direction. The author also mentions the distinction between the spoken word (voice) and the written word (text) and advocates the development of the listener's taste through educative and artistic means, an ideal pursued since the very beginning of the professionalization of radio. Although supported by books on art and aesthetics, the part on radio aesthetics is more fragile when compared to the rest of the book, where Curado Ribeiro works on concepts that are more related to the radio's daily studio work.

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