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Brazilian Auditorium Programs and Questions concerning listening today

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Abstract:

This paper endeavors to present a brief history on the production of auditorium programs in Brazil and reflect on a few of the types of interaction established between radio audiences and program hosts today and the motivations behind audiences that go out of their way to participate personally in these shows. To better understand these questions we bear in mind discussions revolving around the supremacy of the image and the hypertrophy of sight that characterizes contemporary monitor-interface society; the intense rhythms, the suppression of spaces and the encounter of bodies within the context of a major metropolis such as São Paulo; and the role of listening and the possibilities of communication and, therefore, of connecting with audiences through the use of the radio.

Keywords: Auditorium Program; Radio, Body; Connection

Text

The consolidation of radio as a means of mass communication began in the 30's in Brazil. Established in the country based on a commercial model similar to that used in North America, program schedules were comprised of services, information, music programs and, most of all in the 40's and 50's, the Golden Age of Brazilian radio, entertainment. During this period, radio station program schedules presented programs that knew how to exploit and capture the collective imagination of its audiences.

Auditorium programs were a few of the most important among these programs and became popular in the country still in the 30's. And it is during the Golden Age of radio that they were established as an important commercial strategy – especially for divulging music and artists – and, most of all, as a space in which to bring together radio audiences (organized or not in fan clubs), artists and show hosts.

Responsible for introducing important names in Brazilian music as well as being exploited as a political instrument during a period marked in a large proportion by the figure, both charismatic and authoritarian, of President Getulio Vargas, auditorium programs in this stage of radiobroadcasting can be looked upon as microcosms filled with social tension, expectations and passions, inserted in a previously structured communications environment, albeit caught unawares by the high emotions.

Beginning in the 60's, with the consolidation of TV as the country's main communication means, auditorium programs slowly fade into the background of radio program schedules, with many of them being transferred to television.

But, over the last few years, radio auditorium programs are making a comeback, especially in the city of São Paulo. Within a different context than that seen in the 40's and 50's, when the format was progressively

constructed through participation with the audience, the new auditorium programs are transmitted outside the station's studios in São Paulo (which no longer have auditoriums) and in a much cheaper manner than the programs from the Golden Age – all of which counted on the presence of orchestras and large auditoriums. Besides this, they use the new communication vehicles (involving the Internet) and establish new possibilities of interactivity with other languages and audiences (especially through the use of social networks and on-line transmission).

This paper endeavors to present a brief history on the production of auditorium programs in Brazil and reflect on a few of the types of interaction established between radio audiences and program hosts today and the motivations behind audiences that go out of their way to participate personally in these shows. To better understand these questions we bear in mind discussions revolving around the supremacy of the image and the hypertrophy of sight that characterizes contemporary monitor-interface society; the intense rhythms, the suppression of spaces and the encounter of bodies within the context of a major metropolis such as São Paulo; and the role of listening and the possibilities of communication and, therefore, of connecting with audiences through the use of the radio.

The question of physical bodies in radiobroadcasting communications especially with that related to Auditorium Programs yesterday and today

Throughout the trajectory of its civilization process, mankind has searched for forms and means in which to communicate, share his knowledge, values, traditions, techniques and discoveries. The advent of the first electronic means of transmitting information and communicating unveiled the possibility of shortening distances, to reach out to a greater number of people, at the same time and in different localities; allowing therefore, a form of communication in which the physical bodies of those involved in the process are separated and in the need of apparatuses. That which Spanish researcher Vicente Romano (1993) denominated as being tertiary communication means, basing himself on German intellectual Harry Pross's concepts on the means within cultural and communicational perspectives.

Tertiary communication means therefore require apparatuses, means, technical instruments for emission and reception. There are also secondary means, that transport messages to the receptor without requiring they have any sort of apparatus for its appreciation, reception; and finally, primary means.

Primary means are all types of information and knowledge exchange, all interaction that occurs between those present at the moment, face to face. It is worth mentioning that in this means, besides verbal, other languages exist to be exploited and together constitute the communication process. The physical presence of a person with its multiplicity of forms of expressions activate the different senses of all those involved for the apprehension of the message. Therefore, hearing, vision, touch, smell and taste are involved in primary communication means.

Among the other perspectives of tertiary communication we stress here that of the radio, which by means of technical emission and reception apparatuses reach a large number of audiences in different places at the same time; thus bringing to fruition the principle of signal economy. Or, in other words, as its use becomes more widespread as a means of mass communication in Brazil throughout the 1930's, 40's and 50's, the radio involves the hearts and minds of its audiences over great distances through different genres of programs. Romano's concept of signal economy is particularly relevant within economic and political aspects, as the radio, a vehicle of values and ideas, is also exploited as a commercial means and an ideological instrument of power.

With the necessity of finding an adequate aesthetics for this vehicle that did away with images, the radio, in the 30's and early 40's, experimented with genres and formats coming from other areas such as printing, theater, circus, cinema and literature. It is this process of language hybridism that gives rise to various genres and formats of radiobroadcasting programs, among which is the Auditorium Program.

As a concept, Russian researcher Mikhail Bakhtin (2000) elucidates that a genre presents recurrent differentiating or peculiar elements which materialize in their enunciation. Based on the principle that communication is constituted of enunciations, this concept seems to us to be pertinent when reflecting on the characteristics of the auditorium program genre: the peculiar, but impure, elements which characterize it and allow for its identification by audiences.

Auditorium Programs in the Golden Age of Brazilian radio

Unique in its proposal of including the physical presence of the audience in its communication process, either in their own or rented auditoriums, the genre brings the physical bodies of its audiences into a stage setting. Those same bodies which had been up to then reached by the echoing voices of the studio as heard over the large wooden vacuum-tube reception boxes strategically set up in the center of homes for collective listening.

The auditorium program, not unlike other genres and formats which were a part of the program schedule of radio stations in the 1930's, 40's and 50's, was greatly influenced by the North American model. However, the creativity of a mestizo and hybrid people as is the Brazilian reveals that radiobroadcasting aesthetics, woven over the air waves, were marked by a singularity¹, by their "audio-tactile" and "in-color" aspects as conceived by maestro Julio Medaglia (1978: 126): "In Brazil, radio shows have an absolutely peculiar form of expression, the result of which is similar to a *commedia dell'arte* (...) Here radiocasters invent their own language for the vehicle."

The emergence and consolidation of the auditorium programs occurs in synergy with the increased production of electrical recordings of popular Brazilian music.

"Electrical recordings and the evolution of the radio, allied with other novelties changed Brazilian popular music (...) This new process began in July of 1927 and in August of 1928 Odeon launched Mario Reis (...) Soon after his debut, four more multinational recording studios and record factories were installed in Rio (Parlophon, Columbia, Brunswick and Victor), all of which used electrical recording equipment ..." (Peters, 2005: 87)

The association between radio and music is strategically exploited by a political, economical and cultural mechanism that would later come to constitute the country's cultural industry. The press, cinema, theater and radiobroadcasting stations are articulated to better sustain audiences' imagination, seduced by the waves of the first Brazilian means of mass communication. Within this context, the curiosity of seeing the artists in person is presented in that which would be the precursor of the auditorium programs: the Aquariums, as explained by researcher Ana Paula Peters:

"The curiosity of the audiences and their desire to get near the artists resulted in many of them seeking out the radio stations to "see" the programs. (...) At first the public was isolated behind glass partitions, forming what was known as aquariums. (...) Motivated by this climate of intimacy that was established between the singers and radiocasters, many radio listeners began using the studios not only as a place of entertainment, but as one more place for social gatherings, giving rise to the admiration of fans for the radio artists." (2005, : 88 - 89)

Historically, it is worth remembering that Brazilian radio auditorium programs, with the effective participation of audiences and without the presence of any physical barrier separating them from the host or the artists, were spin-offs of talent shows. In 1938, at the Radio Nacional studios in Rio de Janeiro, the first staged Brazilian radio program was written and hosted by Almirante: "Musical Curiosities". That same year Almirante also created "The Question Box", in which he talked to and offered spectators prizes. To do so, he had to climb down from the stage and wander through the audience to get his answers over the microphone. This expedient made it

¹ On the particularities that radio broadcasting aesthetics have acquired in Brazil we indicate Chapter II "The interplay of orality and the written word in the composition of spots" in the book *Radio a oralidade mediatizada* edited by Annablume in São Paulo. We emphasize that "as a consequence of these particularities, that are, among others, the result of the anthropofagic melting pot of ethnicities and languages of which the Latin culture is a product, as well as the late introduction of the written word is that we find, in Brazil, the latent possibility of a differentiated approach of all the radio broadcasting elements. (Silva, 2007: 44)

evident that the auditorium program's host/revel master had to necessarily possess charisma, creativity and the capacity to improvise as elucidated below by researcher José Ramos Tinhorão:

"This structure of auditorium programs as live spectacles would come to provoke, still in the 40's, a curious consequence: studios rushing to hire artists able to please their audiences through their good-looks, wit or originality in presenting the shows on stage... In turn, the consequences of this competition for stage attractions would, from the on-start, valorize radio artists – giving rise to the major contracts which marked the birth of mass idols, or stars." (1981: 67-68)

Throughout the 1940's and 50's auditorium programs were consolidated as a phenomena that mobilized and seduced audiences thanks to the potential of the radio, the creativity of the radiocasters and the logic behind the spectacularization of the cultural industry. Researcher José Ramos Tinhorão elucidates the dimensions of this type of program molded by the singularities of Brazilian radiocasters:

"A mixture of radio program, musical show, vaudeville spectacle, circus and churchyard kermes (raffles were a constant), the high-voltage presentations were able to maintain the auditorium in a state of continuous excitement for three, four or even more hours. To this end, the revel masters counted on the presence of stars² to guarantee their success with the audiences, as well as that of large orchestras, regional bands, solo musicians, vocal groups, comedians and magicians, all of which were mixed in with exotic skits, raffle contests and the distribution of free product samples to spectators." (1981: 70)

As we have seen, the auditorium program is a genre that brings with it the characteristics of other arts, languages; and within this hodgepodge, all are important in the spectacle's composition, the dynamics of which are similar to that of a game (Huizinga, 2005). And thusly, involved in a *game* with well-defined rules and roles, the radiocaster/revel master and the audience/radio listeners construct the atmosphere of a communicational environment propitious for dialogue and interaction within pre-established limits. The body language, voice, clothing; the all-round performance of the host, punctuated by soundtrack and stage setting resources, involve audiences already predisposed towards enchantment and curiosity. In this game, throughout the show, the host/revel master calibrates his performance to better guarantee the return of the audience here considered co-author of the show as observed by medievalist Paul Zumthor (1983) when describing the interaction between reciters of oral poetry and their audience.

As stated by Sonia Virgínia and Luiz Carlos Saroldi (2005: 83), in face of the audience, traditional radiocasters took on a new character: that of the revel master or master of ceremonies. "the equilibrium of the program was left up to the sensibility of the MC, alternating games, raffling prizes, making jokes and using other artifices aimed at exciting the audience and arouse applause."

It is therefore a game in which people interact and allow for, within the pre-determined limits, the necessary contact for effective communication, as, according to Norval Baitello Junior "Communication is the construction of contacts and affection. We cannot construct alterity without affection, without creating empathy. And this is the job of the communicator." (2011: 34).

And as the necessity to communicate and establish bonds with others is inherent in human beings, be it through primary, secondary or tertiary means, as seen in the concepts of the Media Theory presented above, it is important to consider Harry Pross's words: all communication begins and ends with the body³. Therefore, within the context of contemporary communications structured on digital technologies, spaces in which to encounter and exchange are ever more necessary demands. The re-appropriation of the auditorium program genre in contemporary radio program schedules seems to us to be headed in this direction.

² The denomination of "star" refers to the artist, a mass idol whose name was highlighted on the spectacle posters promoted by the radio in the 1930's.

³ Norval Baitello Junior gives us an enlightening explanation on the presence of the body in the communication process: "The body is the first media, it is worth mentioning, man's first means of communication. This also means that it is his first connection instrument with other human beings. The body is language and, at the same time, producer of innumerable languages with which man approaches his similars, connects to them, cultivates these connections, maintains relationships and partnerships." (2005: 62)

Auditorium Programs Today

With the appearance and development of new means of communication and information as represented by Brazilian television in 1950 and later the Internet, the radio takes on new contours and searches for formats and genres that contemplate different resources for producing, airing, participating and interacting with these new communication technologies and digital information vehicles.

This means that in reality this elderly 90 year-old gentleman is now inserted within a context marked by the intense and simultaneous flux of information, through fragmentation, articulation and the crossing of different languages shared in a network, making up that which is being called the "society of access". No longer restricted to sound, radio in this age of convergence has hooked up to the worldwide computer web and provides new means of interaction for its listeners/internauts, the possibility to review and share content in different formats, accompany the program schedule through the use of images from the studios in real time as they are being transmitted. These and other resources made available thanks to digital technology and the possibility of connectivity reaffirm the notion that radio's challenge is, and always has been, to create within, and based on, the intersections between languages.

It is however prudent to point out that within this context of unrestricted access to information, this democratic aspect of the network does not necessarily mean quality of information nor relations, and especially in that referring to the field of communication. Norval Baitello Junior warns us:

"To be connected does not mean one is communicating, but having the possibility of communicating (...) There is a long way between connection and communication (...) The connection, of course, is important (...) but we cannot let connectivity steal the space of other types of communication such as reading, cohabitation, talking personally." (2011: 34)

And within this same context, one also has to acknowledge the super valorization of the visual image⁴, of sight in detriment of the other senses, especially in relation to sound and, therefore, listening. One must not forget that throughout the valorization process of the written word and images, sound is dispensed with and treated like a poor cousin amid the codes of human communications. The society of information and connectivity is therefore also that with an excess of images and visibility.

"The growing insistence on producing images is merely a sign of their saturation. As all of us are obliged to have images, images with a high degree of visibility, we live in the age of visibility and image saturation." (Baitello, 2005: 101)

And the question of saturation is not restricted to the world of visual images, as in the age of digital technologies, production, transmission and access to apparatuses for reproducing sounds almost guarantees its omnipresence, be it in virtual or real-life, public or private environments. In social networks, telemarketing services, speakers in stores, restaurants and parking lots, in public transportation⁵, on street corners, sound can be heard. Some of it the result of "natural" events, and therefore those which are born and then die, but mostly artificially produced continuous sound. Talking machines that emit sounds that linger on indefinitely and influence an individual's moods and behavior.

Contemporary radio is thus a part of a context marked by visual images as well as sonorous saturation, "offering" a continuous, conflicting and anarchic emission of sound resulting in listeners with peripheral hearing that many times are aware of the sounds coming from all directions but make no distinction between them.

⁴ As explained by Norval Baitello Junior (2005: 45) when dealing with images we are taking into consideration all of those that are able to be produced "in different languages: acoustical, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, proprioceptive or visual."

⁵ In February 2008 São Paulo Transporte S.A., SPTrans, the company that manages public transportation in the city, together with the *Bus TV* company installed LCD televisions in 140 buses operating downtown. There are 2 20" tv's on each bus. The intention is to equip the entire fleet by 2010. For more information: < <http://g1.globo.com/noticias/saopaulo> >

As a part of this cultural and economical complex for the production of symbolic goods, the radio searches for alternatives in which to maintain and expand its space in the day-to-day of spectators.

The current salvaging of auditorium programs by a few radio stations seems to us to be an answer, although still only partial, to this increasing demand for visibility – after all, as we saw before “we are all obliged to have images”, as well as the necessity of encountering and connecting with others. Similar to the auditorium programs in the Brazilian Golden Age of radio, some radio stations are recording or transmitting their programs from inside nightclubs, clubs, convention halls, shopping malls and auditoriums with the presence of an audience.

Among the differences between auditorium programs common in the 1940’s and 50’s with those found today is the presence of mobile digital technological apparatuses that participants carry with them and in some cases use to interact virtually despite being physically present on the scene.

At the moment, it has been possible to map at least seven auditorium programs or those with an audience in the program schedule of radio stations in São Paulo transmitted via satellite to other places (states and municipalities) as well as over the worldwide computer web.

Some of the programs identified, such as *Fim de Expediente*, *No Divã com Gikovate* and CBN Network *Caminhos Alternativos* periodically adhere to the format and transmit from auditoriums located in theaters or otherwise. Others are transmitted from theaters or shopping malls such as Eldorado Brasil 3000 Network’s *MPB Café*, or receive a small audience in their own studios as seen in the production of Radio Energia 97’s *Estádio 97* program.



Figure 1: “Fim de Expediente” Program Radio CBN, São Paulo



Figure 2: Radio Globo AM Program, São Paulo

Of the programs identified, some are, by concept, auditorium programs, while others adhere to the format in previously planned presentations (once a week/month, or even on special dates) and practically all of them are

transmitted live. The type of listener participation is determined by the interaction mechanisms previously established by the production team and repeat the same structure of a game (Huizinga, 2005) with its own rules but full of surprises and unexpected events accompanied by the feedback of all those involved. In this particular aspect we found no differences with the programs seen in the 40s and 50s.

It is therefore possible to see how the role of the host, the types of interaction and the very configuration of communication in society today come together to reveal a new type of auditorium or audience program and gives rise to certain questions. One of them is if it is necessary to salvage primary communication as alerted us by Romano (1993) and how body-present interaction occurs amid the possibilities of participating through technologies available on mobile apparatuses. Another question that presents itself concerns the motivation of listeners/internauts to physically dislocate themselves to participate in programs such as these.

Among the hypotheses is that of the necessity of connection, and the possibility of going through an experience that propitiates the involvement of one's senses through hearing in a communicational environment in which all the primary communicational elements (voice, performance, body language, smell and taste) interact simultaneously.



Figure 3: "Caminhos Alternativos", Program Radio CBN, Ibirapuera Auditorium, São Paulo



Figure 4: "MPB Café" Program, Radio Eldorado 3000 FM, Public area – Santana Parque Mall, São Paulo



Figure 5: "MPB Café" Program, Radio Eldorado 3000 FM, Public area – Santana Parque Mall, São Paulo

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