

# Preface

**Madalena Oliveira, Pedro Portela and Luís António Santos**

Editors

## 1. Radio studies

Communication studies are almost one hundred years old, which means they are more or less contemporary to the radio age. Encouraged by Lipmann's arguments on 'public opinion', this research field became particularly essential in the century of mass media and more recently of digital new media and social networks. Although developed with significant enthusiasm, especially in the second part of the 1900's, communication sciences have always been much more focused on the press and on TV than on radio. As a matter of fact, audio media has always been neglected by academics. There is already a long tradition of research on the impact of the press on audiences, and after the 1960s, many studies were initiated on the impact of television on viewers. Radio, in comparison, seems to have always attained less attention from researchers. Eduard Pease and Everette Dennis have mentioned radio as the forgotten medium by choosing this phrase to title a book edited in 1995. As discreet in the research field as in our lives, radio has not been sufficiently considered and valued in terms of its contribution to the current media landscape and contemporary society.

Studies on broadcasting often seem to focus on TV only and to ignore that radio is still the medium that reaches more people all over the world. Why? Why is radio such a timid object of analysis and subject of study? Probably due to its lighter economic impact and as a result of its less conspicuous presence in our daily life. Apart from the historic episode with Wells' *War of the Worlds*, radio has never been at the forefront of heated debates as other media have.

From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the press was roughly criticized by intellectuals, who considered it lower quality literature destined to mainly serve private interests. From the 1950's onwards researchers and opinion makers focused on the impact TV was starting to produce over people's behavior, changing in many cases daily routines. In point of fact, as explained by Denis McQuail in his *Theory of Mass Communication*, television put radio out of sight seriously affecting research on media. On the other hand, television appeared precisely when communication studies were being widely introduced in many universities, meaning that young researchers directed the spotlight to the most recent medium. In spite of its social and cultural relevance, radio therefore remained in the shadows.

With modest academic production, audio media have been relegated to a secondary plane of interest in the communication sciences' scope. Comparing with other areas, radio has less specialized publications and is the central object of fewer research groups. Even for transversal research areas, like gender studies or political economy, radio is considered much more rarely than other traditional media in empirical terms.

However, numerous factors justify a scientific interest on radio. On the one hand, many sociologists' and philosophers' theories on the concept of time, and the way people experience time in postmodern culture have roots in the technology of radio. The idea of velocity and urgency started exactly with radio and its capacity to live broadcast. On the other hand, contemporary debates on the turning point from an ideological to a sensological society might be recognized as being to a certain extent based on radio's intimate nature. With an unpretentious language, radio discourse is also a very rich source for analysis on the way verbal language in particular and sound in general promote the design of mental images and stimulate imagination. Finally, before any other modern

media, radio opened channels for direct and live participation of its audience, which put it in the front line of participatory communication studies.

Although confined to a narrow group of researchers, normally as attracted by radio as practitioners who tend to speak about the medium in a passionate way, radio thus remains, as stated by Pease and Dennis (1995), «a medium of unparalleled power and importance». For the role it played in the beginning of the mass communication society, inspiring a culture of live communication, and for the role it still plays in the constitution of a sound atmosphere and promoting music industry, radio has today not only a historic interest but still a relevant position in the media landscape.

## **2. Radio Evolution**

Contemporary studies have tended to announce the death of radio since the beginning of the television. These discourses have been particularly intensified after the Internet revolution. Radio's adaptation to the web has been discussed skeptically. On the one hand it could be said that the World Wide Web represents a promise of reinvention for the old medium. On the other it seems that Internet is a new risk that threatens the place of radio. One of the most common weaknesses pointed out to radio is its blindness. The absence of image seems to be the major reason why radio has been considered an insufficient or incomplete medium. Ironically the century of radio is also the century of all emergent forms of images. From picture postcards and posters to cinema and television, the history of the image during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is synchronized with the history of radio as a mass medium.

The evolution of radio in the age of Internet is however more than a question of visibility. It involves a reflection on the way people use media in general and radio in particular, on the expectations of the public and on the challenges multimedia structures represent. This means the evolution of radio is a subject that has to be discussed from diverse points of view. To encourage precisely such a discussion was the main objective of the congress organized by the Communication and Society Research Centre and ECREA Radio Research Section at University of Minho, Portugal, in September 2011.

With the special support of Renascença Group, whose main radio station celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this congress welcomed about one hundred researchers coming from more than twenty countries. For three intense days, radio was debated in four perspectives: technology, audiences, content and the role it plays in identity. Almost eighty papers were presented and a dozen of experts – academics and practitioners – contributed to the scientific discussion.

This eBook is part of the work developed during those days. It puts together 47 papers representing almost 60 percent of the total of accepted abstracts for the congress. Summing up more than five hundred pages, this book aims at contributing to the increase of radio studies and the enlargement of the scientific community working in this field.

A warning must however be given. Only a small number of the texts published in this book comes from native English speakers. The editors asked authors to contract professional revision, but it is not certain that everyone did it and it is impossible to warrant the quality of the services contracted by diverse authors. A global revision was additionally made by two Communication and Society Research Centre's members. The editors are thankful to Elsa Costa e Silva and Mário Camarão for their help in the final proof-reading. Notwithstanding this effort, it would be impracticable to standardize the entire book in terms of language style and to correct it in terms of grammar and syntax. For these reasons, this eBook must be read with some tolerance by those to whom some mistakes may sound ungentle. We hope that in view of the greater goal such obstacles can be easily overcome.