

### PERNAMBUCO SPEAKING TO NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL AND TO THE WORLD: ART DÉCO AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF BROADCASTING Aline de Figueirôa Silva<sup>1</sup>

Art Déco is being (re)visited by the historiography of Brazilian architecture and there is still space for unknown, distinguished members, the rich and poor cousins of a large family scattered throughout Brazil. With each new survey, and each new publication, similar or local versions of the style appear. This article revealed, on the one hand, traces of a common genealogy, and on the other, brought to light some virtually unknown examples, which are significant for the Pernambuco collection, and perhaps for that of the whole country<sup>2</sup>. We therefore propose to skim through the architecture of broadcasting in Pernambuco, and focus on upstate municipalities<sup>3</sup>.

From 1920 onwards, Brazil joined the era of recording and radio, an era which lived its golden years between the 30s and 50s, amid a climate of political, social, artistic and intellectual effervescence. The country's first broadcast dates from

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September 7, 1922, made by President Arthur Bernardes during the centenary celebrations of Brazilian Independence (COMEGNO, 2008:11-14). The radio had become a medium for information and entertainment. It hosted festivals and musical auditions, radio soap operas, radio theater, chat shows, educational and sport broadcasts and practiced the so-called “public service journalism”.

In 1948, Francisco Pessoa de Queiroz, Bachelor of Law, diplomat, politician and owner of the *Jornal do Commercio* newspaper, opened the Recife *Jornal do Commercio* Radio, with the slogan “Pernambuco speaking to the world”. From 1951 onwards, he expanded broadcasting in the region by establishing four broadcasting stations upstate with the slogan “*Pernambuco falando para o Nordeste*” (Pernambuco speaking to the Northeast). The first radio station was set up in Garanhuns and was followed by Caruaru and Pesqueira – identical triplets – and, finally, came Limoeiro, supposedly the youngest in the Pernambuco family and an identical twin.

Pernambuco researchers disagree about the authorship of the architectural design of the radio stations in Recife and upstate. We attributed the design of the Garanhuns radio station and also those of Caruaru and Pesqueira to the engineers Hugo Guimarães and Paulo Pessoa de Queiroz (*Jornal do Commercio*, 5/26/1951).

In these three towns, the architectural complex includes an auditorium, studios, dressing rooms, waiting rooms, director’s office, and transmitters set on a plot which also houses an enormous antenna, fixed to the ground with trussed beams. The complex is surrounded by an outer wall with a garden at the entrance. Set in the middle of the site, the building is richly decorated on all façades and elements of streamline style are used. The geometric differentiation of the volume corresponds

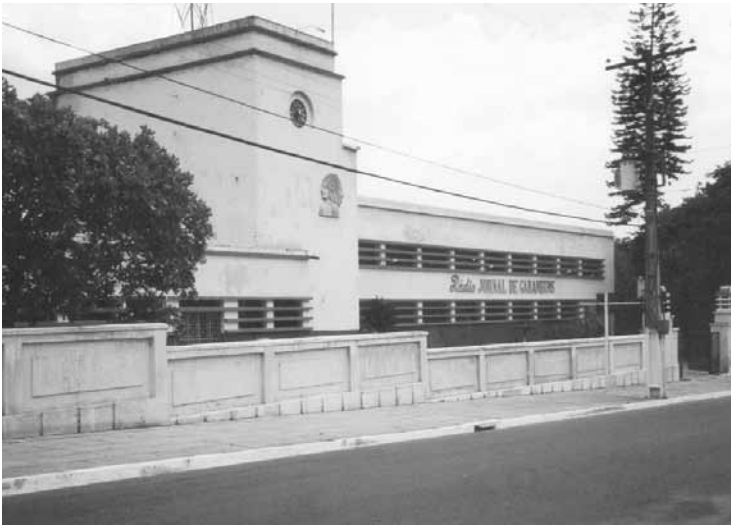
to the functional distinction in the plan. The tower houses a small pantry, the water reservoir and the clock machinery, and gives access to the roof passing by three hatch windows.

Its rounded corners, staggered elements, indentations with continuous louvre windows, horizontal concrete light breakers, and the typefaces on the façade and in the auditorium are indelible marks of Art Déco and express the speed of modern naval and aeronautical machines. The cement-tiled roof is hidden by the finishing friezes of the façade.

The clock and the effigy of an indigenous man, symbol of the *Jornal do Commercio* and nationally identifiable, appear on the front façade. The auditorium holds about 500 numbered wooden chairs and the wall behind the stage is undulated, undoubtedly to provide better acoustic effects. Its brickwork is decorated with sculptural relief, depicting elements of regional flora, music notes and airwaves.

The glamour of the gold rush era appears in the gold joinings of the black and green granolithic flooring, enormous doorways, wall and clock lighting, extending into the public lighting. The loudspeaker in the Limoeiro radio station mezzanine was used for listening to radio soap operas. This radio station is different in terms of both plan and building, occupying as it does a site in the middle of the block, while its antenna was built on a hill called Cruzeiro. There is a direct connection between the street and the dressing rooms, to ensure private access for the artists. There is also a great hall, where pompous events took place. The upstairs floor contains a residence and also houses the clock machinery.

Different ancient documents, which have been lost, would indicate its public service function as a lost-and-



Garanhuns Radio Station, photo by the author; 2005.



Pesqueira Radio Station: Clock, indigenous man, hatch window and wall lighting, photos by the author; 2009.

found office. The four radio stations used the same building materials, furniture, toilet bowls and wash basins, men's and women's cubicles and style characteristics, all forming exquisite examples of Art Déco.

In our visits to the stations, we heard many valuable testimonies and collected memories of goods and facts that recalled the past. Despite the wear and tear, the Pesqueira, Limoeiro and Garanhus radio stations have maintained their ancient characteristics even if put to new uses. They conserve their original features and are imposing constructions in the urban landscape. Of all the stations, Caruaru, the only one listed by the Pernambuco Foundation for Historical and Artistic Heritage, underwent the greatest change after the installation of the Shopping and Entrepreneurial Complex. The Recife News Radio station quite literally *tombou*<sup>4</sup>! It was replaced by a supermarket in 1989 (AMORIM, 2007: 67, 98).

4. Translator's note: a play on the verb 'tombou' which means both 'collapse' and 'listed'.

The Pesqueira and Limoeiro stations are fairly intact, and have conserved their original furniture, loudspeakers, floors, relief, gates, louvre windows, window surrounds, box offices and machinery, and still maintain the atmosphere of the golden era. Conventions, events and public celebrations are held in the Limoeiro radio station, now the Centro Cultural Ministro Marcos Vinícius Vilaça, thereby answering a need in the town, and equally a possibility in other cases. The Pesqueira radio station houses the current Radio Jornal AM 1390 in its small studio.

It is amazing that these architectural projects still remain standing, considering the censorship imposed by the military regime. They also faced competition from the 1960s onwards from Television, which robbed them of their casts and night audiences and from the FMs in the 70s and 80s (COMEGNO, 2008; MORAIS, LIMA & MARQUES, 2004). The Pernambuco radio stations are impressive buildings which now speak through us if not to the world, at least to the Northeast and to Brazil. And who knows? To (re)encounter other unknown relatives...

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