

Latin American Cultural Studies and Jesús Martín-Barbero: more affinities than disputes

Estudos culturais latino-americanos e Jesús Martín-Barbero: mais afinidades do que disputas

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ABSTRACT

Although Martín-Barbero claims that “we had done cultural studies long before this label appeared”, this article sustains that, without *De los medios a las mediaciones* (From the media to mediations), Latin American cultural studies would not have developed, especially those linked to communication studies. The argument highlights the kinship between cultural studies, especially in the version associated with the Birmingham School, and the premises of the research program proposed by the Spanish-Colombian author. To trace these affinities, the combination of methodological programmatic and ethnographic approaches was adopted.

Keywords: Cultural studies, Latin America, Martín-Barbero, Birmingham School

RESUMO

À revelia da afirmação de Martín-Barbero de que “nosotros habíamos hecho estudios culturales mucho antes de que esta etiqueta apareciera”, trata-se aqui de reivindicar que, sem a obra *Dos meios às mediações*, os estudos culturais latino-americanos não teriam vingado, em especial aqueles vinculados à comunicação. Na defesa desse argumento, destaco o parentesco entre os estudos culturais, sobretudo, na versão associada à Escola de Birmingham, e as premissas do programa de investigação proposto pelo autor espanhol-colombiano. Para rastrear essas afinidades, adoto a combinação entre duas vias metodológicas: a programática e a etnográfica.

Palavras-chave: Estudos culturais, América Latina, Martín-Barbero, Escola de Birmingham

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And Barbero was your mother's maiden name?

Sure. For Brazilians and others the second last name comes first, then, the first bibliography in which I appeared as Barbero was in Brazil. When I saw it written that way, I said: "It's a matter of justice"¹.

Jesús Martín-Barbero

¹In the original: "¿Y Barbero era el apellido de tu madre? Sure. Los brasileños y otros ponen primero el segundo apellido, entonces, en la primera bibliografía en que yo aparecí por Barbero fue en Brasil. Cuando lo vi escrito de esa manera dije: 'Es una historia de justicia'". This and the other translations were made by the author of the article.

²In the original: "nosotros habíamos hecho estudios culturales mucho antes de que esta etiqueta apareciera".

³Such denomination is linked to the theoretical-methodological legacy associated with the collective of researchers gathered at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), founded by Richard Hoggart, in 1964, at the University of Birmingham. Its first director, Hoggart (1964-1968) was succeeded by Stuart Hall (1969-1979) and, posteriorly, by Richard Johnson (1980-1987). In 2002, the university management closed the CCCS.

ALTHOUGH MARTÍN-BARBERO (Spielmann, 1996: 47) claims that "we had done cultural studies long before this label appeared"², this article sustains that, without *De los medios a las mediaciones* (From the media to mediations) (1997), Latin American cultural studies would not have developed, especially those linked to communication studies. This is one of the reasons for it being a classic, limiting the definitions of Calvino (1992) for the term to the borderline of its impact on the academic field. Defending this argument, the highlight is for the kinship between cultural studies, mainly in the version associated with the Birmingham School³, and the premises of the investigation program proposed by the Spanish-Colombian author, regardless of the resistance to the use of this label.

To track these affinities, the combination between programmatic and ethnographic approaches is adopted (Restrepo, 2012). Through this methodological articulation, three lines of centripetal force between the two intellectual projects are identified, that is, the interdisciplinarity, political inclination and contextualism affinities – the last was developed by Grossberg (2012). Last but not least, conflict points supposedly in dispute between the two projects are observed. These, in their turn, might set three lines of centripetal force. Basically, the questionings that found this presumable dissent are: adoption of the label *studies of the culture* rather than *cultural studies*; defense of a genealogy based on diverse theoretical matrices, especially those associated with the Latin-American native thought instead of the existence of a connection mainly with the British tradition and, finally, although related to this last conflict, the concern about adhering to an intellectual colonialism position through the decontextualized incorporation of theoretical contributions coming from the North. To develop this argumentation, the article is structured into two parts. First, the affinities earlier mentioned are identified and then the disputes are exposed.

Nevertheless, before that, three explanations are necessary. The first of them is about programmatic methodology. It presupposes to admit that determined criteria characterize the cultural studies. According to Restrepo (2012), when adopting such positioning, there is a risk of being prescriptive and normative,

legitimizing a certain conception and, therefore, obstructing the theoretical plurality claimed by this study field. However, Stuart Hall (1996: 263), who stands up for such theoretical opening, at the same time sustains the need for indicating an amalgam:

Although cultural studies as a project is open-ended, it can't be simply pluralist in that way. Yes, it refuses to be a master discourse or a meta-discourse of any kind. Yes, it is a project that is always open to what which it doesn't yet know, to that which it can't yet name. But it does have some will to connect; it does have some stake in the choices it makes. It does matter whether cultural studies is this or that.

Then, identifying theoretical positions in common, even they do not configure a positioning completely unified among its diverse practitioners, is not aimed. Other researchers associated with cultural studies – for instance, David Morley (apud Escosteguy, 2010: 266) –, also stand up for this position.

Thus, the programmatic approach appears as valid formula to identify both a characterization of the cultural studies project and Martín-Barbero's research project. Regarding the latter case, the combination with the ethnographic approach will allow giving greater attention to his practice, intellectual trajectory, topics studied, political interventions and vast work, although not in an exhausting way due to the limits of this article.

The second explanation is about the pertinence of the term ethnographic in the scope of the methodological strategy implemented. In this case, this approach means to understand that theoretical positions do not occur on the fringe of the biographic and subjective context, of life experiences and memories, largely publicized in author's interviews and statements, for instance Beasley-Murray (2001) and Martín-Barbero (2016). For this reason, one agrees with Morawicki (2016: 12):

our conviction is that the theoretical potency of some authors does not finish on the pages that announce their theories, but also in the narrative of their life experiences that are precisely those which expand the questions for the ways of knowing⁴.

Finally, the third explanation is crucial for understanding the purposes of this article. Although the label *Latin-American cultural studies* is used and the polemic generated by its use is recognized, no one wastes time with it. This is because the core of the argumentation here is based on other parameter, away from

conflicts inherent in all “policy of naming” [that] are part of interpretative struggles that agitate theoretical and cultural fields, since naming is always a way to categorize,

⁴In the version consulted: “nuestra convicción es que la potencia teórica de algunos autores no termina en las páginas que enuncian sus teorías sino también en el texto de sus experiencias de vida que son precisamente las que terminan de ampliar las preguntas por los modos de conocer”.

and dominant categorizations take advantage of the representational power that manages the relationship of inclusion and exclusion, centrality and margin⁵. (Richard, 2010: 11)

⁵In the original: “conflictos inherentes a toda ‘política de nombrar’ (Catherine Walsh) son parte de las luchas interpretativas que agitan los campos teóricos y culturales, ya que nombrar es siempre una forma de categorizar y las categorizaciones dominantes sacan ventajas de los abusos del poder representacional que administra la relación entre inclusión y exclusión, centralidad y márgenes”.

Thus, to solve at least one foolish misunderstood, it is highlighted that cultural studies practiced in Latin America are different from studies practiced in the United States and developed a particular investigation agenda, including *on* Latin America, as well as reaching a disciplinary and institutional organization radically different from that of our (sub) continent (refer to, for instance, Richard, 2010; Szurmuck; Irwin, 2009).

Without further delay, affinities and possible disputes that find the crossings between both research programs are identified.

THE AFFINITIES

As it was mentioned, I privilege, in the scope of the convergences between research programs in analysis the interdisciplinarity, contextualism and political inclination of the intellectual practice.

For cultural studies, interdisciplinarity framework is essential because issues and questions on *the cultural*, constituted inside this field, demand more than focus and/or methodology associated with a specific discipline, for instance, literary criticism or anthropology. At the moment of foundation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at University of Birmingham, Richard Hoggart (apud Schulman, 1999: 169) declared that the new approach had “something in common with several existing approaches [for instance, literature, sociology], but was not exactly any one of them.” Later, also Stuart Hall (2017: 24) argued that

⁶In the version consulted: “trabajar en el campo de los estudios culturales no necesariamente significa que uno crea que el mundo entero puede explicarse desde un punto de vista cultural. En realidad, a veces pienso que trabajar en los estudios culturales es más bien como decidir trabajar en un campo desplazado, porque gran parte de lo que uno requiere para comprender las relaciones culturales no es, en ningún sentido evidente, cultural. En este aspecto, los estudios culturales son un campo interdisciplinario”.

working in the cultural studies field does not necessarily mean that one believes the whole world may be explained from the cultural point of view. In reality, I sometimes think that working in the scope of cultural studies is as deciding to work in a dislocated field because most of what is necessary to understand the cultural relationships is not, in any evident sense, cultural. In this aspect, the cultural studies are an interdisciplinary field⁶.

If on the one hand this kind of statement and type of analyses on the field may collaborate in the clarification of this approach configuration, on the other hand, they generate a lot of criticism⁷. Regardless of the last ones, what matters is that “the explanations on culture [given by cultural studies] are not limited to the

⁷In Latin-American scope, refer to: Follari (2003); Reynoso (2000).

intrinsically cultural (as certain anthropology and other culturalist reductionism tend to do so), but incorporate externalities as social relationships, power or economy”⁸ (Restrepo, 2012: 127).

It is observed that there is strong rapport between the newly stated affirmations on cultural studies and a number of Martín-Barbero’s statements and reflections on the theme. Recently, the author (2016: 149, 199) recognized that:

In fact, now I take stock and realize that anthropologists, political scientists and historians were the first to start understanding this book [De los medios a las mediaciones], both in this country [Colombia] and in Latin America. For communication investigators, it was very difficult to get out of their little world. [...] I feel increasingly away from the communication field as it is practiced and experienced at universities⁹.

In addition, in analysis on Martín-Barbero’s positioning, García Canclini (1993: 7) learns that “research in communication is seen less as a discipline than as a chapter, that is, a dimension of the cultural analysis”¹⁰. In other words, Martín-Barbero’s major work does not fit well into the boundaries of the communication field, not even for its own author.

Still, there is certain reciprocity related to the criticism that his proposal receives and to the disapproval of cultural studies for it being considered “weak theory” (Follari, 2003). In Brazilian context, it is possible to identify among the precursors of critical examination of Barbero’s proposal, Signates (1998) and, more recently, Marcondes Filho (2008). Exegesis and criticism that took a new breath from a controversial confront with the issue of mediatization, although for some (Braga, 2012; Santi, 2013; Silva, 2012) there is more continuity than discontinuity between this perspective and the perspective of mediations¹¹.

Even it being very hard to determine the very moment at which Martín-Barbero questioned the disciplinary conventions, there is no doubt that *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1997) is a milestone that crystallizes this reconsideration. When opening this text (1997: 15), the author talks on the disciplinary displacement that occurs in his own intellectual itinerary:

I came from Philosophy and through language paths I’ve found the adventure of communication. And from the Heidegger’s house of being I arrived with my bones to men’s slum-house, constructed with clay and bamboo rods, but having radio transmitters and TV aerials¹².

⁸ In the original: “las explicaciones de la cultura no se circunscriben a lo intrínsecamente cultural (como tienden a hacer cierta antropología y otros reduccionismos culturalistas), sino que incorporan exterioridades, como las relaciones sociales, el poder o la economía”.

⁹ In the original: “De hecho, hago un balance ahora y me doy cuenta de que quienes empezaron a entender ese libro fueron antropólogos, politólogos e historiadores, tanto en este país como en América Latina. A la gente de comunicación se le hizo muy cuesta arriba salir de su mundillo. [...] Entonces, siento que cada vez estoy más alejado del campo de comunicación tal y como se practica y se vive en las universidades”.

¹⁰ In the original: “La investigación comunicacional es vista menos como una disciplina que como un capítulo, o mejor una dimensión del análisis cultural”.

¹¹ Here, the objective is not to center the convergences between cultural studies and Martín-Barbero’s program, specifically in the mediations conceptual issue, what other authors have already done – more recently, refer to Serelle (2016).

¹² In the original: “Venía yo de la filosofía y, por los caminos del lenguaje, me topé con la aventura de la comunicación. Y de la heideggeriana morada del ser di así con mis huesos en la choza-favela de los hombres, construida en barro y cañas pero con radiotransistores y antenas de televisión”.

Many authors have already said that Martín-Barbero's effort is focused on understanding the particularities of Latin America's approach to modernity through a vision centered much more on Philosophy than on media studies (Szurmuck; Waisbord, 2011). Also, one emphasizes the importance that language starts having in the construction of narratives and collective identities by means of the highlight given to Paulo Freire's contributions throughout his doctoral study.

By the way, in the analysis of Herman Herlinghaus (1998: 22), the questioning on the disciplinary crosslinks has already occurred long before the publication of *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1997).

In his doctorate thesis he has already experienced an unusual encounter between semiotic concepts, sociological perspectives and Latin America literature imaginary. Opting to act in an interdisciplinary way from the institutionality of a single discipline was an issue that he faced when returning to Colombia in 1973¹³.

This was how Martín-Barbero entered Universidad dell Valle (Cali), repositioning the communication studies out of the technological axis and assuming the density of the *cultural*, consequently, "conceiving them explicitly as social sciences and cultural studies"¹⁴ (Herlinghaus, 1998: 23).

Much later, in interview to Maria Immacolata Lopes (Martín-Barbero, 2009: 153), the author himself states: "The study [of communication] has to be clearly interdisciplinary. That is, we are facing an epistemology that puts in crisis the object of study itself." Finally, in his research program, "the inscription of the communication in the culture is no longer a mere cultural subject, since both economy and politics are inserted directly into what is produced therein"¹⁵ (Martín-Barbero, 1990: 14). The kinship between this positioning and the cultural studies project is clear. One considers that there is a strong connection between both intellectual practices.

Following the lines of centripetal forces, it is observed that it is possible to understand an intellectual *project* without also understanding its formation, and that the relationship between a *project* and its *formation* is always decisive. Still, according to Williams (2011), the emphasis of cultural studies is precisely on its commitment to both, instead of specializing in one or another. That is, cultural studies is not concerned about a *formation* of which some *project* is an illustrative example, or about a *project* that is related to a *formation* understood as its context or background (Ibid.: 172).

Under the point of view of Hall (2017: 27), understanding this relationship is to assume the context aspect of the theory. Then,

¹³ In the original: "En la tesis de doctorado ya había experimentado un encuentro insólito entre conceptos filosóficos, semióticos, perspectivas sociológicas e imaginarios de la literatura latino-americana. Una problemática que se le planteaba al regresar a Colombia en 1973 era decidirse a actuar transdisciplinariamente a partir de la institucionalidad de una sola disciplina".

¹⁴ In the original: "concebirlos explícitamente como ciencias sociales y estudios culturales".

¹⁵ In the original: "la inscripción de la comunicación en la cultura ha dejado de ser mero asunto cultural pues son tanto la economía como la política las concernidas directamente en lo que ahí se produce".

it is important to understand that the concept of culture was proposed not as answer to any theoretical question, but as answer to a political problem [author's emphasis] and a very concrete interrogation: what happened with the working class, from the appearing of economic abundance?¹⁶

For this reason, it is important to briefly highlight the particular historical condition of Great Britain, at the end of the 1950's. It was a moment of fast expansion of capitalist relationships to the entire culture field, as well as of collapse of the Britain Emperor (War with Egypt/Suez Channel), parallel to the disappointment at the communist model (Soviet invasion in Budapest, 1956), which caused the formation of a political movement called New Left. It is to this political performance field that several Birmingham School's members converge. To beyond its importance in England's political arena and the leftist intellectual movements of the post-war Europe, one of its more lasting activities was the publication of the New Left Review where, in addition to the analyses of strictly political character, themes related to arts and culture were also in evidence. From a theoretical perspective, "the task to dethrone the tradition represented by T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis and the aristocratic notions [on culture] that it implied" (Schulman, 1999: 175) contributed to the conformation of the cultural studies. The peculiarities of Britain history context, encompassing from the political area to the academic field, its *formation*, marked permanently the constitution of the cultural studies *project*.

In the terms of Cevasco (2003: 64), "artistic and intellectual projects are constituted by social processes, but they also constitute these processes according as they give them form"¹⁷. Finally, this argumentation flows to the discussion on the characteristic of contextualism, created by Grossberg (2012), i.e., the excellence of the principle of the relationship between the terms that configure determined happening, fact, event, phenomenon or cultural practice. This is other remarkable aspect both of cultural studies and of Martín-Barbero's reflection.

In the intellectual scenario, the recognition of the popular subject protagonism and his/her practices, in work, politics and daily living scopes, practiced by "Raymond Hoggart"¹⁸, is something embedded in the architecture of *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1997). The path of these readings together with the social transformations which America Latin was experiencing – "the stubborn facts"¹⁹, in Martín-Barbero's words – will create a matrix of analysis that supersedes certain objects of study, instituting others. Especially that which gives centrality to the place of the subject, obliterated by hegemonic perspectives in the communication studies of that moment, which gave

¹⁶ In the original: "es importante comprender que el concepto de cultura se propuso no como la respuesta a alguna pregunta teórica, sino como una respuesta a un problema político y un interrogante muy concreto: qué pasó con la clase trabajadora a partir del advenimiento de la abundancia económica?".

¹⁷ In the original: "os projetos artísticos e intelectuais são constituídos pelos processos sociais, mas também constituem esses processos na medida em que lhes dão forma".

¹⁸ Paul Jones' wordplay is used to refer to the presence of this element both in Raymond Williams' and in Ricaher Hoggart's work. Refer to Jones (1994).

¹⁹ In the original: "los tercos hechos".

advantage to the structure of media property and the technological and textual determinism.

If, up to the end of the 1970's, the hegemonic ideas in media studies followed an instrumental model, strong theoretical dislocation occurred from the 1980's.

The expansion and interpretation of cultural studies and communication are not fortuitous nor occasional, they answer the strategic place that communication occupies both in the process of cultural re-conversion – which the new stage of modernization demands in those countries –, and in the crisis that modernity suffers in central countries. It is not possible to understand the actual scenario (the 1990's) of these studies without thinking of such crossroads²⁰. (Martín-Barbero, 1993: 61)

²⁰ In the original: “La expansión e interpenetración de los estudios culturales y de la comunicación no son fortuitos ni ocasionales, responden al lugar estratégico que la comunicación ocupa tanto en los procesos de reconversión cultural –que la nueva etapa de modernización requiere en estos países–, como en la crisis que la modernidad sufre en los países centrales. No es posible comprender el escenario actual de esos estudios sin pensar esta encrucijada”.

It is the reception or valuation of the capacity of popular receptors in producing meanings different from those prioritized by the hegemonic culture that appears as the issue that will make this displacement possible. And it is by means of this reading key that *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1997) will be read in Latin American scenario, provoking one more connection with cultural studies, especially with its British version (e.g., Hoggart, 1973), centered on the working class' lifestyle, its values, attitudes and process of negotiation with the expanding commercial culture.

In other words, by rehabilitating the popular experience, Martín-Barbero (1986: 42) intends

to change the analysis axis and its starting point. The rescue of the subdued subject's ways of answer modified the process of decoding, from the field of communication, its channels, media and messages to the field of culture, or better saying, of the conflicts that culture articulates, of the conflicts between cultures and hegemony²¹.

²¹ In the original: “cambiar el eje del análisis y su punto de partida. El rescate de los modos de réplica del dominado desplazaba el proceso de decodificación del campo de la comunicación, con sus canales, sus medios, y sus mensajes, al campo de la cultura, o mejor, de los conflictos que articula la cultura, de los conflictos entre culturas y de la hegemonía”.

It can be observed the commitment to Gramsci categories and, therefore, to a certain Marxism, as well as to the study of culture – or cultural practices traditionally marginalized or discredited – necessarily within social formations. It evidences its political and transformer potential. In this sense, Latin American cultural studies, based on Barbero's reflection, develop giving preference to the culture social materiality and its symbolic political dimension.

Consequently, the analysis has as focus the conflicts, negotiations and consensus that are under tension in social reality, politicizing the culture scope. This positioning gives consistence to the note of Restrepo (2012: 129) that in cultural studies there is “a politicization of the theory and theorization of the

political”²², constructing an “intellectual practice in strong relationship with concrete political interventions.”²³ Or, still, according to Stuart Hall (2003), a practice in cultural studies tries to make an intervention in the world and, for this reason, needs to have a positioning with some points of difference or distinction to defend.

However, the uses of *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1997) provoke two repercussions in Latin America scenario: the political restlessness is replaced by an increasingly methodological concern and the *reception* dissolves as room from which popular cultures are thought, becoming object in itself. In short, “if the investigation of the reception was the most useful way found in the historical context to understand the production of hegemony, the notion of hegemony fades and tends to disappear from many contemporary studies on reception”²⁴ (Grimson; Varela, 2002: 163). It is the emergence of depoliticization that, based on the euphoria about the vitality of the audience (s), understands the reception as autonomous and specialized room, not suffering pressure from structural determinations that limit the creative capacity of the subjects – something away from Barbero’s thought.

In Brazil, important room in Latin American design, this work also exerted notorious influence. Originally disseminated through copies that were passed hand to hand, it had its first edition in Portuguese only in 1997. Until the turn of the century, it generated the first wave of use completely associated with aforementioned characteristics. Also, it gave rise to a number of criticism discourses²⁵ – one more quality of a classic, as Calvino teaches us.

However, the publication, in 2003 of a new Brazilian edition with the addition of a preface, originally published in 1998 in Spanish, brings opportunities for other wave to be constituted through the use of a “new map”²⁶. There, the distinction is in the “culture communicative mediations” and in the novelty of the presence of institutionality, which rescues the existence of regulation regimes and, therefore, of power relationships. The betting on the recuperation of political dimension is clear. Besides, it is opportunity to retake the totality of the communicative/cultural process, that is, the relationship between both parts – production/reception, author’s original inspiration.

Shortly, Martín-Barbero’s cultural analysis dialogs with an integrated and holistic vision of cultural production, circulation and reception/consumption that does not allow itself to be enclosed in the limits of a single discipline, following the example of what has been defended in the room of cultural studies²⁷. At the same time, it provides room and reveals sensitivity towards objects and issues that, traditionally disqualified, acquire scientific statute: soap opera, miscegenation between popular and mass cultures, recognition of

²² In the original: “una politización de la teoría y teorización de lo político”.

²³ In the original: “práctica intelectual en estrecha relación con intervenciones políticas concretas”.

²⁴ In the original: “si la investigación de la recepción fué el modo más fructífero que se encontró en un contexto histórico para dar cuenta de la producción de hegemonía, la noción de hegemonía se y tende a desaparecer de muchos estudios contemporáneos de la recepción”.

²⁵ Recently, this wave of revisions and criticism had new stimulus from its confrontation with the mediatization issue.

²⁶ In cartography of the uses of the Map of Communicative Mediations of Culture (Martín-Barbero, 2003) in empiric investigation, in the Brazilian context, it was observed that, although it has highlighted position in the theoretical methodological debate, this Map is still little explored, whether integrally or partially. Even so, the beginning of a wave was identified in 1987, when *De los medios a las mediaciones* is published, and one second wave that would be anchored on the reformulations of the “nocturne map” presented in 1998. In the second wave, the recognition of such perspective as a theory on the communicative circuit would be clear, constituting integrated vision of production, circulation and reception. Nevertheless, this understanding is still very incipient. Refer to Escosteguy; Sifuentes (2017).

²⁷ Refer to discussion presented by Escosteguy (2007).

pleasure and leisure in social life. All of this, but preserving the particularities of sociocultural reality of Latin America. Although these same marks are not exclusive of cultural studies, it seems to be coherent to argue that there are more convergences and affinities than discrepancies and disputes between these two practices, since the consolidation of Latin American cultural studies occurs simultaneously with the active use of this author and, in special, of *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1997).

THE PRESUMIBLE DISPUTES

Anyway, the new confront between Martín-Barbero's research program and the cultural studies project raises tensions and discomfort recurrently. Among them, the following can be highlighted: repudiation in adopting the cultural studies label, claim to think from theories that do not have origin in foreign contexts and, associated with the two previous conditions, fear of importing certain theoretical models of cultural studies, without the due care of reconstructing them in new context.

In Martín-Barbero's intellectual trajectory, it is evident the concern about the theoretical place from which it is talked to, as well as for the practice in cultural studies, as it was noticed before through Stuart Hall's considerations. Again, it is difficult to date when this positioning appears in Martín-Barbero's trajectory. However, in recent texts plot, he recognizes that he is "almost fifty-years old trying to think *with his own head* [author's emphasis] of what they call processes, practices and media, and in this order of importance²⁸ (Martín-Barbero, 2015: 14). Therefore, his reflection does not easily cede to the claims of incorporation of theories coming from the North.

Still, other declarations illustrate the recognition of connections between the theoretical work from South and North, even without mimesis:

We owe a lot to the investigators both from the North and from the South – of India or South Africa –, but this does not convert us to mere imitators as a French folder suggests. We feed ourselves with works from Birmingham School, E.P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, as well as from North Americans Jean Franco, Frederic Jameson, Richard Sennet and Arjun Appaduray. But we construct our own theoretical references to the sound and rhythm of the processes that cross ours countries²⁹. (Martín-Barbero, 2010: 133)

Besides, Martín-Barbero emphasized (Beasley-Murray, 2001: 223), on different occasions, his relationship with French (for instance, Paul Ricouer and

²⁸ In the original: "sus casi cincuenta años intentando pensar con su cabeza eso que llaman procesos, prácticas y medios de comunicación, y en ese orden de importancia"

²⁹ In the original: "Debemos mucho, tanto a los investigadores del Norte como los del Sur – la India o Sudáfrica – pero eso no nos convierte en meros imitadores como sugiere un panfleto parisino. Nos hemos alimentado de los trabajos de la Escuela de Birmingham, de los E. P. Thompson, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams y Stuart Hall, como de los norteamericanos Jean Franco, Frederic Jameson, Richard Sennet y Arjun Appaduray. Pero hemos ido construyendo nuestros propios referentes teóricos al son y al ritmo de los procesos que atraviesan nuestros países".

Michel de Certeau), German (Walter Benjamin) and Italian (Antonio Gramsci) intellectuals' work.

My acquaintance with cultural analysis emerges around two sets of authors and follows two distinct paths. The first is marked by Gramsci and Benjamin. [...] The second path starts, towards the end of the 1970s, with my discovery of the historian E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart. [...] During the 1980s, the perspectives emerging from the Birmingham Centre were to have a profound influence on me.

Anyway, he resists adhering to the use of the label of Latin America cultural studies to denominate his work, giving preference to the denominations as culture studies³⁰ in Latin America or studies on communications and culture³¹. In the first case, emphasizing mainly his identity regarding Latin American essayism and, in the second, Paulo Freire's thought. Nevertheless, in certain moments, speaking of his influences and admiration for cultural analysis practitioners, emphasizes, "in second place", the triad – E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, assuming that "the perspective of Birmingham" will mark him "deeply, intellectually" (Beasley-Murray, 2001). Thus, the association with cultural studies is also relatively accepted and recognized by the author.

What seems to be implied in the discomfort with the denomination *Latin America cultural studies* is that assuming this label means to incorporate an intellectual project originated in the North, whether in England or in the United States and that, therefore, does not suffer influence from theoretical repertoire coming from other latitudes and times. In the case in question, exactly in Latin America. "However, the intellectual projects that may adopt this denomination do not necessarily have to answer to agendas import, North American authors and issues or British cultural studies"³², as Restrepo (2012: 140) explain to us by recovering Walter Mignolo's position. In view of this, it does not obligatorily mean a new expression of intellectual colonialism that reveals the expansion of theoretical matrices of metropolises to the periphery.

Finally, it is observed that in Barbero's research program the differences of social and institutional contexts are not ignored, nor the presence of distinct intellectual traditions at the center of its theoretical framework. Consequently, the use of the label *Latin American cultural studies* does not imply the deletion of the historical density of the place – vital impulse in the commented work, although the process of globalization also appears in the scope of the reference frameworks, involving epistemological repercussions. On the contrary, it reveals that, mainly in the actual context, the dialogue between

³⁰ For Restrepo (2012: 126), "los estudios sobre la cultura constituyen un campo amplio y contradictorio donde se encuentran disímiles encuadres disciplinarios, interdisciplinarios y transdisciplinarios que se refieren a la 'cultura' como su objeto de análisis. Desde esta perspectiva, entonces, lo que se ha dado en llamar 'antropología cultural', 'sociología de la cultura', 'crítica cultural' y 'estudios culturales' pertenecería a este heterogéneo campo de los estudios *sobre* la cultura. Por tanto, no se podría confundir estudios culturales con estudios sobre la cultura, ya que los primeros serían, a lo sumo, una parte o componente de los segundos".

³¹ The statements of Maria Immacolata V. de Lopes (Meirelles, 2008: 9) in an interview published on *E-compós* exemplify this position "On Barbero and Canclini, I do not think they are representatives of the cultural studies in Latin America. They are not. They are called representatives incorrectly. Doing studies of culture is something different from doing cultural studies. In Latin America, we have a very strong tradition of studies of culture" (in the original: "Sobre Barbero e Canclini, eu não acho que eles são representantes dos estudos culturais na América Latina. Eles não são. São chamados assim de maneira incorreta. Fazer estudos de cultura é uma coisa, fazer estudos culturais é outra coisa. Na América Latina, nós temos uma tradição fortíssima de estudos de cultura"). Other possibility would be to adopt the term studies of culture and power, created by Daniel Mato (2005).

³² In the original: "No obstante, los proyectos intelectuales que pueden adoptar esa denominación no necesariamente tienen que responder a la importación de las agendas, autores y problemas de los *cultural studies* estadounidenses o británicos".

theoretical production from the North and the South, from metropolises and periphery, is inevitable.

And what, in fact, makes a difference, is to be committed to a determined way of studying culture, marked by contextual and conjunctural approach, committed to the recognition of cultural differences that are crossed by power relationships. Then, the important is to take positioning, situated at interdisciplinary field, which seeks to understand, evidence and intervene, from a contextual focus, on determined articulations between the cultural and the political, making it explicit that its issue is constituted in the crossing between culture and power. That is what it is all about when the label of cultural studies is claimed.

Specifically, in Martín-Barbero's itinerary, these same premises are concentrated in the challenge of persisting to think of communication "from social processes and practices whose transformations destabilize what we had as 'subject' and 'object' of investigation"³³ (Martín-Barbero, 2015: 28). This means to stop thinking about the process of communication from the disciplines to start thinking about them "*desde la cultura*" (from culture). The signals of this theoretical displacement were observed in the late 1970's, reaching its consolidation in the 1990's, mainly by means of the track of *De los medios a las mediaciones* (1997), contemporary movement with the recognition of the cultural in Latin America. In view of the mentioned, Martín-Barbero's work condensates much more affinities than tensions and conflicts regarding cultural studies, which would be better framed among us as unfunded disputes. ■

³³ In the original: "desde unos procesos y prácticas sociales cuyas transformaciones desestabilizan lo que teníamos por 'sujeto' y 'objeto' de la investigación".

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